

Preaching in an Audio-Visual Culture:
Lessons for Homiletics from a Study of Selected British and
American Religious Radio Broadcasters.

Jolyon Peter Mitchell



Through the ear you see
and that
is the extraordinary gift of radio.

Angela Tilby

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It is important to emphasise that this work is my own,
and that I take full responsibility for the argument which follows.

Abstract

This thesis considers the question of how to communicate orally and effectively in an audio-visual culture. In particular it investigates what preachers can learn from the work of selected British and American religious radio broadcasters, in a social context where a whole range of audio-visual stimuli compete for the congregations' and audiences' attention.

In the first part of the dissertation (Chapters 1, 2 and 3), it is argued that preachers hoping to be heard in an audio-visual culture have much to learn from radio broadcasters. The case is made by investigating three fields: homiletics, radio and aspects of our audio-visual culture. It is argued in the first chapter that homileticians have already responded in a variety of ways to the challenge of communicating orally and effectively in a media-saturated society. Whilst many have drawn upon the language of television and film, radio has been almost entirely ignored. The second chapter shows how radio broadcasters have constantly adapted their techniques in order to survive continually changing conditions. It claims that preachers have much to learn from the theory and practice of radio broadcasting. It is suggested, for example, that Ed Murrow and Richard Dimbleby's aptitude for creating pictures with words, has lessons for preachers aiming to connect with their listeners today. An important strand of the argument in the third chapter is the suggestion that the skill of creating pictures with words remains a powerful tool for preachers seeking to be heard in an audio-visual culture. In particular, it is concluded that the use of pictorial language may assist preachers as they attempt to act as critical interpreters, orally deconstructing or building upon televisual stereotypes.

In the second part of this dissertation (Chapters 4, 5 and 6), a number of specific homiletical lessons are discerned from the practice of various religious radio broadcasters. Both positive and negative insights are drawn from speakers operating in a range of cultural and communicative settings. In the fourth chapter the Second World War broadcasts by the radio padre, R.S. Wright, and the radio academic, C.S. Lewis, are concentrated upon. The fifth chapter focuses on *Thought for the Day* broadcasts by Angela Tilby, Lionel Blue and David Winter. In the sixth chapter a range of American Radio Preachers are considered. In these chapters it is argued that preachers can learn from pictorial, conversational and engaging discourse heard on the radio.

In the third part of this dissertation (Chapter 7), the practical theological grounds are put forward for arguing that preachers need to translate their language into pictorial and multi-sensorial discourse. It is suggested that preachers who are learning about oral and effective communication from religious radio broadcasters, need to develop a practical theology not only of pictorial language, but also of multi-sensorial language. This contention is based upon a range of sources, including the work of a "radio bishop", a provocative text by William Willimon, examples of radio broadcasts from some of the previous chapters, and an analysis of relevant works by Walter Ong and Jacques Ellul. Engaging critically with this material I put forward a case for a renewed approach to orality, rooted in the translation and embodiment principles which lie at the core of Christianity. On the basis of these seven chapters, a number of lessons for preachers seeking to be heard today are outlined in the conclusion.

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Introduction

i. Opening Issues

Preachers and radio broadcasters face a crucial question: How do you communicate orally and effectively in a society where a whole range of audio-visual stimuli compete for your congregation's or audience's attention? This thesis will attempt to offer a number of answers to this question.

One of the foundational contentions of this research is that preachers have much to learn from radio broadcasters, especially when considering how to communicate orally in a media-rich "public sphere".¹ Whilst the converse may also be true - radio broadcasters have much to learn from homileticians² - this side of the equation will not be discussed in this dissertation. One of the central aims of this thesis is therefore to explore what homileticians can learn from radio broadcasters, in particular, from religious radio broadcasters.

Over the last decade a whole range of homileticians have wrestled with the question of how to communicate orally in a media saturated environment.³ A number have argued that preachers now need to learn the language and forms of film and/or television. This case has been promoted from a variety of perspectives. In *The Practice of Preaching*, for example, Paul Scott Wilson encourages preachers to "create a movie with words".⁴ David Buttrick, author of *Homiletic* develops a more

¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, translated by Thomas Burger, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989 (1962). This is not intended as a specific reference to the "bourgeois public sphere", nor "the refeudalisation of the public sphere", rather it is aimed to highlight the public nature of the discourse and context considered in this thesis. Such a broad definition finds support from Habermas' own admittal that: "the usage of the words "public" and "public sphere" betrays a multiplicity of concurrent meanings." p.1.

² Homiletician is a term more commonly used in the USA. I will use it here in the widest sense to include both those who study preaching and those who actually preach.

³ See, for example, Thomas H. Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1990, especially his "Theological Reflection on Remote Control", and "Video Replay in Preacher's Head", pp.16-23, and Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Imagery for Preaching*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989.

⁴ Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1996, p.183, p.255, 267. This is a recurring theme in this text.

“analogical” style of argumentation.⁵ He draws upon a film-making analogy to demonstrate how preachers should make “moves” in their sermons.⁶ Thomas Troeger outlines a “cinemographic technique, which includes leaping through spans of time without the sustained development of a logical argument.”⁷ Other homileticsians have turned to television. Timothy Turner suggests that “preachers should capitalize on TV’s strengths and exploit its weaknesses”;⁸ while Derek Weber argues explicitly, “preaching must adopt the new language and forms used by television”.⁹ Some of these, and other scholars who argue for a “revised rhetoric”,¹⁰ will be considered in greater detail in Chapter 1.

It will be suggested that those approaches do indeed have much to teach preachers. They do not necessarily offer, however, the complete solution to the problem of communicating orally in a mediated context, where not only the sense of *sight*, but also the sense of *hearing* is frequently the recipient of electronic communication. It is possible that such terminology and methodology, especially if it is drawn uncritically from the visual media *alone* may be misleading and unhelpful.¹¹

Thor Hall argued in the early 1970s that: “The study of communications media belongs inextricably within the ecology of homiletics.”¹² This is an important point, which finds explicit and implicit support throughout this thesis. The methods and impact

⁵ I am using this term in the non-technical theological sense to mean that Buttrick draws a likeness between preaching and camera movement. For a more in depth analysis, discussion and usage of this term see David Tracy’s fascinating text, *The Analogical Imagination*, New York: Crossroad, 1981.

⁶ See, for example, David Buttrick, *Homiletic, Moves and Structures*, London: SCM, 1987, p.55.

⁷ Thomas H. Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1990, p.48. Troeger sets out two contrasting wedding sermons. One of them “uses the flash of a camera to make the transition from scene to scene.” Thus he describes it as a “cinemographic [sic] technique”.

⁸ Timothy Turner, *Preaching To Programmed People - Effective Communication in a Media-Saturated Society*, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1995.

⁹ Derek Weber, *Preaching To Be Heard in a Television Age: A Study of the Homiletical Response to the Modern Media Context*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 1993, p.7. (Hereafter referred to as: Derek Weber, *Preaching to be Heard in a Television Age*, PhD., 1993.)

¹⁰ Bernard Reymond, “Preaching the New Media”, *Modern Churchman*, New Series, Vol. XXXIV, No.5, 1993, pp.19-29, see especially the section on “The Need for a Revised Rhetoric”, p.26.

¹¹ For example, at times, the vast gulf between the experience of sprawling in a comfy cinema seat on a Saturday night engaged by 20 foot images and sound to match, compared to wriggling in an uncomfortably hard pew on a Sunday morning, is ignored too easily in these discussions.

¹² Thor Hall, *The Future Shape of Preaching*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971, p.4.

of the communications media should not and cannot be ignored by those concerned with oral communication in what has been described as the “disenchanted public sphere”.¹³ Within the field of homiletics, the limited, and at times superficial, study of the media has understandably focused on film and television. It will be argued in this thesis that aspects of the theory and practice of radio broadcasting also have much to offer preachers.

In particular, it will be asserted that there is a need to develop a re-newed or re-formed language which draws less upon abstract theological concepts, and more upon the art of making pictures with words. It will be argued that pictorial language has the potential to create alternative imaginative worlds for listeners. This “turn towards the imaginal” finds support from a wide range of homileticians,¹⁴ in what has been described as “the New Homiletic”.¹⁵ James Wallace, for example, argues that there has been a change in the “ideal of preaching” from:

.....an act of rhetorical excellence to a perception of preaching as an act of imaginative theology. Rhetoric, the art of persuasion, has given way to poesis, the art of making or shaping with words.”¹⁶

This thesis will focus in particular on the “art of making or shaping” pictures with words. There is not as yet a developed homiletical theory of visual language which draws upon or learns from the practice and experience of radio broadcasting. This dissertation intends to fill that gap.

¹³ Nick Stevenson, *Understanding Media Cultures - Social Theory and Mass Communication*, London: Sage, 1995. Note the unexpected fusing of Weberian and Habermasian terminology.

¹⁴ For the “turn towards the imaginal” see James Wallace, *Imaginal Preaching - An Archetypal Perspective*, New York: Paulist Press, 1995, p.8. See, for example, Paul Scott Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart - New Understandings in Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1988; and Thomas Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1990.

¹⁵ See: Robert S. Reid, “Postmodernism and the Function of the New Homiletic in Post-Christendom Congregations”, in *Homiletic*, Winter/1995, Volume XX/Number 2, pp.1-13. “The paradigm shift in homiletics, known as the New Homiletic, has been occurring during the past two decades primarily in Protestant homiletical theory. The shape of the new paradigm has now been well defined. It represents a radical shift away from the rationalistic and propositional logics of argumentation as the basis of sermon invention and arrangement.” p.7. One of the central characteristics of the New Homiletic is the “creation of an affective experience for the audience of a sermon”. p.7.

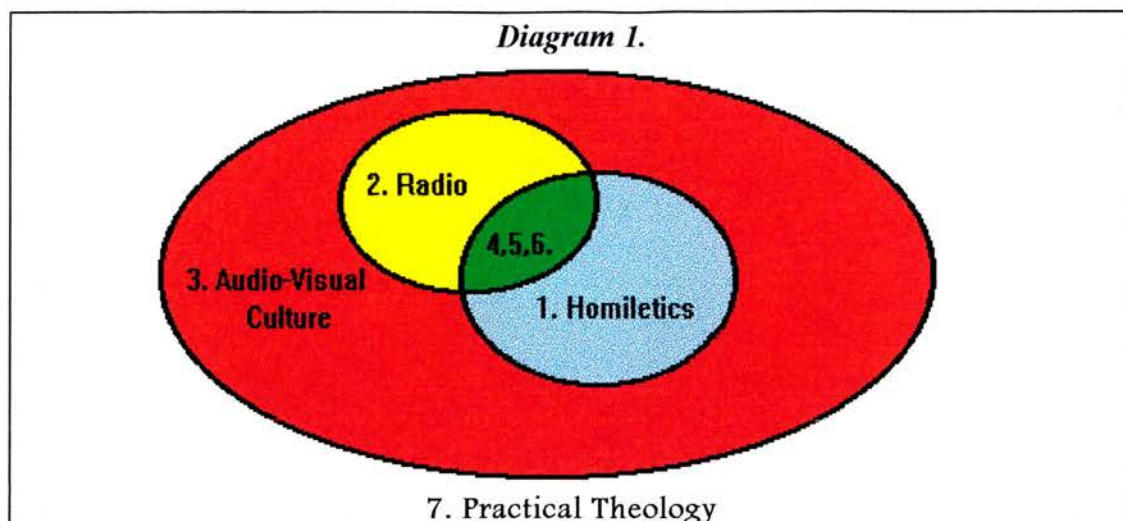
¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.8.

It is also important to underline that I am not suggesting that we ignore the form, the texts or the impact of television and film. I will maintain that these media have played a considerable part in shaping today's communicative environment and expectations, as well as the form of orality employed in the West. "Television," Kathleen Jamieson argues persuasively, "has changed public discourse dramatically".¹⁷ Those concerned with developing preaching and religious radio broadcasting which will connect with congregations and audiences, cannot ignore the transformations that orality has undergone as a result of film and television.¹⁸ This important point will be considered in detail in the seventh chapter of the thesis. Whilst homileticians are at last beginning to take increasing notice of these two media, they have unfortunately generally ignored the significant contribution of radio.

A deceptively straight-forward question therefore provides a starting point for this thesis. What have preachers to learn from religious radio broadcasters in an audio-visual culture? As the thesis progresses more specific fields of inquiry or questioning will be delineated. A number of interrelated fields of study will be considered in order to begin to answer this question. On a simple level, the areas of focus in this thesis could be represented graphically in the terms of Diagram 1:

¹⁷ Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Eloquence in an Electronic Age - The Transformation of Political Speechmaking*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p.44.

¹⁸ See: Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967, and Chapter 7 of this thesis.



This diagram illustrates a number of important points. First, the act of preaching and radio broadcasting are distinctive forms of communication, which properly have discrete fields of study. For this reason the first two chapters will explore the field of homiletics (Chapter 1: blue) and radio (Chapter 2: yellow) independently. This is crucial in order to understand the theoretical and empirical bases upon which homileticians can learn from radio broadcasters. Secondly, the fields of radio and homiletics cannot be discussed without reference to the communicative context in which they are set and to which they contribute. For this reason the “audio-visual culture” (Chapter 3: red) will be analysed. This will be undertaken primarily by discussing a small number of “audio-visual” texts. One important strand within the argument of this third chapter will be that such audio-visual portrayals merit a constructively critical oral response.

Thirdly, the worlds of homiletics and radio meet or overlap in the area of religious radio broadcasting, and more specifically, radio preaching (Chapter 4,5,6: green). This is a diverse field which provides valuable empirical material for studying both the positive and negative lessons that preachers can learn from radio broadcasters. Lessons include the use of pictorial language as an aid to communication, and the barriers that insider-discursive styles can create for outside listeners. Fourthly, and partially on the basis of these practical and theoretical discussions, a practical theology of pictorial and multi-sensorial discourse will be outlined (Chapter 7: white). Finally, this diagram illustrates how each element of the discussion is inextricably connected.

ii. Thesis Outline

Thus it will be argued in the first chapter that homiletics has faced a series of crises. One of the most significant is the result of the communication revolutions, or perhaps more accurately the communication evolutions.¹⁹ The rapid development, expansion, and convergence of communication technologies has even led some to argue that preaching is an anachronistic form of communication.²⁰ Such an extreme position will be refuted. The second phase of the argument in the first chapter will suggest that there have been a number of transitions within the field of homiletics. These shifts will illustrate how a range of homileticians have attempted to develop models which are more effective for oral communication in the midst of a media saturated society.²¹ It will be suggested that one of the most significant shifts is the move towards engaging the visual imagination.

In the second chapter it will be argued that radio too has faced a series of crises. It has, in fact, survived and is enjoying a degree of revival. This move from crisis to renaissance will be analysed. The transformations which radio has undergone will be discussed in detail before moving on to consider the different roles of pictorial language. The work of a number of radio theorists will also be considered. In particular, the work of Rudolf Arnheim will be critically evaluated. It will be argued

¹⁹ Michael Traber, "Changes of Communication - Needs and Rights in Social Revolution", in Slavko Splichal and Janet Wasko, editors, *Communication and Democracy*, Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing, 1993. He argues provocatively that: "All genuine revolutions are fundamentally communication revolutions", p.30. See also: Derek Weber, "Communication Revolution" in *Preaching to be Heard in a Television Age*, Ph.D., 1993, pp.19-20.

²⁰ See: Klaas Runia, *The Sermon Under Attack*, Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1983. See also: i) David Crowley and Paul Heyer, *Communication in History, - Technology, Culture and Society*, Second Edition, White Plains: New York, Longman, 1995. This text provides a useful range of important articles on the history and **development** of communication. ii) Stewart Hoover, *The Electronic Giant*, Illinois: Brethren Press, 1982. On the basis of an extensive discussion of the **expansion** and convergence of various communication technologies, especially television, he forcefully argues that "a revolution is happening, a revolution that will change forever most of what we know and do." p.145. iii) Thomas F. Baldwin, D. Stevens McVoy and Charles Steinfield, *Convergence - Integrating Media, Information and Communication*, London: Sage, 1996. This text explores a number of issues relating to the **convergence** of communication technologies through the development of an integrated broadband system. See especially Chapter 6: "Convergence of Voice/Video/Data Information".

²¹ See: Wesley Carr, *Ministry and the Media*, London: SPCK, 1990. Carr argues that: "one point is indisputable, we live in a media saturated environment." p.58.

that making pictures with words has far more significance for radio broadcasters than Arnheim advocated. On the basis of this second chapter, it will be suggested that preachers have much to learn from the experience of radio, and in particular, the use of pictorial language.

The third chapter will consider our audio-visual culture. It will be argued that effective communication in radio and in preaching must now take seriously the implications of working within and being part of an audio-visual culture. In particular, “media awareness is no longer a luxury, an affectation or a hobby”.²² Homileticians cannot afford to ignore their hearers’ context or the rapidly developing electronic media which are currently shaping it.²³ As this is a vast subject, and its entirety is beyond the scope of this thesis, the third chapter will analyse a number of specific examples of recently broadcast television material. It will be argued that these explicit and implicit portrayals of the “divine” and “faith” often create or reinforce stereotypical perceptions,²⁴ which demand “critical demystification”,²⁵ as Michael Warren argues:

Increasingly, the electronic means of communication have been able to create for large numbers of persons a world of meaning they tend to consume, not to create or even to engage creatively.²⁶

Stereotypical religious portrayals on television can be consumed unthinkingly as Warren suggests, or they can be actively appropriated by viewers into their own meaning systems.²⁷ Irrespective of whether one perceives the audience to be passive

²² Stewart Hoover, *The Electronic Giant*, Illinois: Brethren Press, 1982, p.155. “In the future, no one who wishes to develop expertise in the disciplines of teaching, ministry, counselling, or even parenting will be able to consider themselves prepared unless they have also dealt with the development of basic media awareness, consumption, and advocacy skills.”

²³ A point supported by Robert Waznak when he argues: “Authentic preachers of the sacred text cannot ignore the video context in which they now preach”, “Preaching the Gospel in a Video Culture”, in Paul A. Soukup, editor, *Media, Culture and Catholicism*, Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1996, p.141.

²⁴ David Barrat, *Media Sociology*, London: Routledge, 1990 (1986). Barrat outlines a range of studies on the stereotyping of Women, Gays and Black People. Like most other scholars discussing stereotypes he makes no reference to the stereotyping of religious faith or people. pp.44-51.

²⁵ Michael Warren, *Communications and Cultural Analysis - A Religious View*, Westport, Connecticut: Bergin and Garvey, 1992, p.68.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.127.

²⁷ Stewart Hoover provides a contrasting view to Warren’s analysis in, “Media and the Construction of the Religious Public Sphere”, in: Stewart M. Hoover and Knut Lundby, editors, *Rethinking Media*,

or active, some stereotypes have the potential to contribute to a world of meaning where God is understood as silent and irrelevant, or as an opiate for the insecure or the sick. It will be argued that such portrayals need to be critically demystified. A variety of iconoclastic and iconographic approaches to television will be considered. No scholar, to this author's knowledge, has argued that preaching has the potential both to critique and also to draw upon such portrayals. It will be argued that preachers can critically deconstruct such electronic pictures through the employment of pictorial language, the use of which has the potential to engage creatively with a variety of senses, and also can provide a useful method for creating an alternative world of meaning.²⁸ Offering a different view of the world with words can itself be an act of creative critical demystification, since through engaging the imagination it highlights an alternative way of perceiving reality.

The first three chapters will thus provide an overview of the homiletical landscape,²⁹ an insight into the expanding city of radio and a series of brief expeditions into the audio-visual world of television. These chapters will supply a clear but limited picture of the context in which the discussion of oral communication in an audio-visual culture will take place. They will examine some of the fields of previous discussions in preaching, radio and audio-visual studies, and they will also lay the foundations for the detailed case studies which lie at the heart of the thesis.

The next three chapters will be devoted to considering examples of radio discourse. Chapter 4 will analyse the work of two popular Second World War British religious radio broadcasters. In particular it will be argued that both broadcasters made use of representational pictorial language as a way of attempting to engage their listeners'

Religion, and Culture, London: Sage, 1997. Hoover argues: "we have an active, sentient audience-one that, to an extent, can be said to act in ways that involve choice, appropriation, and re-integration of content, recognizing at the same time that the range of choices is not unlimited." p.288.

²⁸ Parables are understood by many scholars to create "alternative worlds of meaning". See Chapter 3 section 5 of this thesis and see also Mary C. Boys, "Parabolic Ways of Teaching" in *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 1983, 13:3, pp.82-9.

²⁹ "Homiletical landscape" refers in this context to recent significant studies in homiletics which are pertinent to this thesis. Thomas Troeger employs a contrasting metaphor, "city of homiletical wisdom", to describe significant texts in homiletics. Thomas H. Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1990, p.23. See: "Finding Help in the City of Homiletical Wisdom", pp.23-26.

attention. Their work represents early examples of pre-television radio practice, and in terms of what homileticians can learn from them today, they should be interpreted cautiously. They do, nevertheless, provide useful insights into how even early radio broadcasters attempted to develop intimacy with their audiences through their choice of language and also their style of delivery. It will be further argued that the use of pictorial language is an important but by no means the sole lesson to be gleaned from their practice.

Chapter 5 will move on fifty years to analyse the work of three current leading religious radio broadcasters. Their work provides a number of useful insights into the importance of constructing specific and highly visual radio broadcasts. The sources, theory and practice of their broadcasting will be discussed, as another attempt to identify further lessons for preachers today. It will be argued that one important lesson to be drawn from their practice is the vitality of their use of pictorial language. It will be suggested that this has the potential, in the words of Rabbi Lionel Blue, to “break down the wall” between the “ghetto and the boulevard”.³⁰

Chapter 6 will move across the Atlantic to analyse the work of a range of American radio preachers. Their diverse work provides a useful contrast to the broadcasts considered in the preceding chapters. Radio preaching in this context is a multi-faceted phenomenon born in a commercial radio environment, which is literally and metaphorically a considerable distance from the public service broadcasting case studies analysed in Chapters 4 and 5. It will be argued that there are a number of lessons for preachers to learn from this rich primary source material. It will be argued, for example, that insider-discourse born within an enclosed discursive community has the potential to create a barrier with those outside the closed semi-private sphere. Also paralinguistic idiosyncrasies, such as shouting at the microphone, may undermine the bridging potential of pictorial language. These extreme cases provide insights into particular American sub-cultures and illustrate how closely connected radio and preaching have become in parts of the United States of America.

³⁰ Rabbi Lionel Blue, private recorded interview with Jolyon Mitchell, Edinburgh, 31 October 1995.

The evidence of these three chapters, combined with the discussions of the preceding three chapters, have suggested a qualification to my original hypothesis. It was anticipated that the central argument of this thesis would be that preachers can learn in particular from religious radio broadcasters' use of pictorial language. At the outset of this project I anticipated, therefore, making a straightforward case for pictorial language in a visual culture. In its simplest form it would roughly be expressed in these terms: "Oral communication within a visual culture is problematic, particularly because we are surrounded and bombarded by artificial electronically formed images. One effective tool for preachers to communicate with and to counter this world of electronically constructed pictures is pictorial language, as used by many radio broadcasters. This practice finds theological support in a range of biblical examples, including the pictorial language employed by Jesus in his parables." To my surprise, the empirical data which I would expect to support this case, did not permit this line of argument to proceed without some qualification and development.

First, the widely used term, "visual culture", appears to be too narrow a definition of our communicative environment. Chapter 3's study of recent television programmes, for example, highlights how not only images, but also words contribute towards an audio-visual text's meaning. On the basis of this study, combined with the range of radio investigated, it was clearly more accurate to speak in terms of an "**audio-visual culture**".

Secondly, whilst it will be argued that making pictures with words is an essential tool in the "renewed orality" of preachers and radio broadcasters, it will also be contended that this is by no means the only approach available. The case studies in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 provide a wider range of material than anticipated. In short, there are many other positive and negative lessons to be learnt from the work of religious radio broadcasters. This thesis will not attempt to construct a comprehensive list of all of these insights, but it will outline a number of other factors which have the potential to undermine or add to the effective use of pictorial language in an audio-visually dominated communicative environment.

Thirdly, a careful and critical reading of scholars such as William Willimon, Walter Ong and Jacques Ellul in Chapter 7 has led to a reappraisal of the theological foundations of this thesis. I had anticipated arguing that the nature of God's revelation was not only mono-sensory, through hearing, but also bi-sensory, through sight and hearing. Even this understanding now appears to be too narrow. It will be argued that it needs to be expanded to a "multi-sensorial" understanding of God's communication.³¹ Whilst we must not underestimate the importance of language, nevertheless, the "logos became flesh".³² On this basis it will be argued that God communicates through and engages with not only the ears and eyes, but the entire person.

On the basis of this multi-sensorial engagement, a case for discourse which engages the listener multi-sensorially will be put forward in the final chapter. It will be asserted that pictorial language can develop into more than simply a bridge between the two senses of hearing and sight. It could stimulate not only the visual and auditory imaginations, but also the olfactory, gustatory and tactile imaginations.³³ A case will be made for a form of preaching which attempts imaginatively to engage not only hearing and sight, but also smell, taste and touch. There is a sense, therefore, in which this thesis has evolved from purely an affirmation of pictorial language to advocating the development of a renewed preaching orality which draws upon a multi-sensorial approach to discourse. One answer to the original question, "How do you communicate orally and effectively in a society where a whole range of other audio-visual stimuli compete for your audience's or congregation's attention?", may be found in pictorial and multi-sensorial discourse.

At the heart of the argument in the seventh chapter is an attempt to develop a practical theology of multi-sensorial language. Two particular theological principles will be outlined. They are the "embodiment principle" and the "translation principle",

³¹ This position finds explicit support from Gérard Heinz. See: Gérard Heinz, "God's revelation is not by words alone" in *Media Development*, 4/1981, Vol. XXVIII, pp.34-38. Heinz's emphasis on the "pluri-sensorial" nature of God's revelation is considered in Chapter 7 section 5 vi. of this thesis.

³² John 1:14

³³ See: Walter Ong, *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977, p.131, and Chapter 7 section 4 iii. of this thesis.

and they provide the theological foundations for the form of preaching being promoted in this thesis.

iii. Methodology

I will primarily be employing a variety of qualitative, as opposed to quantitative, approaches to analysing the data. A recent review of the field by Tesch (1990) identified over forty types of qualitative research.³⁴ Elsewhere Tesch (1991) identifies three basic categories of qualitative research.³⁵ This project falls into two of these areas. First, the language based approach which is interested in how people communicate, and secondly the descriptive/interpretative approach.³⁶ As has already been highlighted, the central question of this thesis is: "How do you communicate orally in a society where a whole range of other audio-visual stimuli compete for your audience's or congregation's attention?" My specific aim is to answer this question through an analysis of what homiletics can learn from religious radio broadcasters.

In order to fulfil these goals, I made use of three research tools. The first was to hold detailed **interviews** with a variety of protagonists in the fields of religious radio and homiletics in both the UK and the USA. A second approach was the critical **analysis** of specific primary audio and visual "texts". The third approach was to rely on **critical engagement** with secondary texts in a wide range of fields, including homiletics, radio and communication studies, as well as related theological texts. As the technology continues to develop and its uses fragment, so in each field there is a rapidly growing body of literature. I have based my discussions upon an extensive range of writings from each of these fields in order to ground my thesis in the ongoing

³⁴ Renata Tesch, *Qualitative Research: Analysis Types and Software Tools*, London and Philadelphia: Falmer Press, 1990. p.58. This is also cited in Ian Dey's useful *Qualitative Data Analysis, A User-Friendly Guide for Social Scientists*, London: Routledge, 1993. pp. 1-2.

³⁵ Renata Tesch, "Software for Qualitative Researchers: Analysing Needs and Programme Capabilities" in Nigel G. Fielding and Raymond M. Lee, editors, *Using Computers in Qualitative Research*, London: Sage, 1991. pp 17-25. The third category is the "theory based" approach. I am again indebted to Ian Dey for this citation.

³⁶ Ian Dey, *Qualitative Data Analysis, A User-Friendly Guide for Social Scientists*, London: Routledge, 1993. p. 2.

academic discussions. In short, I employed a range of methods for gathering the relevant qualitative data.³⁷

My theoretical sensitivity has been sharpened by the triangle of experience: professional, personal and academic.³⁸ I have therefore worked as a reflective practitioner who has participated, observed and interviewed. The data uncovered has been analysed from each of these three perspectives. My experience as a radio producer and as a preacher has assisted my qualitative analysis of scripts, broadcasts and interviews, as well as my critical reading of recent relevant written texts.³⁹ My personal, “hands on”, knowledge of these fields has helped me to understand the pressures and opportunities which both broadcasters and preachers face today. The methodology employed has therefore been informed and strengthened by my own practical experience in broadcasting and homiletics.

Using my experience of interviewing and directing interviews both as a journalist and radio producer, I collected over two dozen in-depth and focused interviews on tape. I do not agree with Judith Bell who argues, in *Doing Your Research Project*, that there is “no use” in tape recording interviews, except to “check the wording of a statement you may want to quote”.⁴⁰ It was far easier to concentrate on the discussion when there was no concern about taking written notes. There were also implicit meanings

³⁷ Nicholas W. Jankowski and Fred Wester argue that the “multiple method approach is best known under the term *triangulation*”. It could be argued that at times I employ a triangle of methods to analyse religious radio: interviews of broadcasters, content analysis of broadcasts, and secondary evaluation of broadcasters contribute to my discussion. Such “triangulation”, however, “does not absolve qualitative researchers of interpretative work”. See: “The qualitative tradition in social science inquiry: contributions to mass communication research”, in Klaus B. Jensen and Nicholas W. Jankowski, editors, *A Handbook of Qualitative Methodologies for Mass Communications Research*, London: Routledge, 1991, pp.62-3. (Hereafter referred to as: K.B. Jensen & N.W. Jankowski, eds., *Qualitative Methodologies for Mass Communications Research*, 1991.)

³⁸ This represents a less formal understanding of the term “triangle”, which refers to my taking three different viewpoints to analyse the data. Thus, triangulation is being used to refer not to three distinct voices nor three methods, but to my own analysis of the data from three separate points of view. For a useful discussion of theoretical sensitivity see: Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*, London: Sage Publications, 1990, p.41 ff.

³⁹ I have produced over 100 programmes for BBC World Service and BBC Radio 4, and I have preached in a variety of contexts and denominations including: Prisons, schools, university colleges, inner city UPA’s, suburban and city centre churches, and a cathedral.

⁴⁰ Judith Bell, *Doing Your Research Project*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987. p. 75.

in the tone of voice or the length of silences in some responses which would have been missed if I had relied upon written notes. The tape recorder proved an effective tool for capturing crucial aural signs.

The experience of many social anthropologists would support this case. Denis Tedlock argues, for example, that: "It is not only the voice of the storyteller that is set free by sound recording, but also the ear of the mythographer".⁴¹ In Tedlock's eyes the reason for this freedom is that the interviewer is not "scribbling furiously away in a notebook while the performer waits to see whether it will be necessary to go back or whether it will be possible to get on with the story." Tedlock may be referring primarily to eliciting "performative texts" from American Indians, but, his arguments are pertinent for understanding why a methodology which drew on a large amount of recorded material was employed in this thesis.

A further reason for relying heavily upon recorded material can be seen in Chapter 6's discussion of American radio preachers. Verbal extremism and discursive idiosyncrasies merited careful attention and benefited from repeated listening. The form of content analysis, which relies upon merely counting words or terms, was deemed unfruitful for analysing these audio-texts.⁴² Instead, elements of a "discourse-analytical approach" and a "qualitative content analysis" which focused upon what has been described as "the *enunciation*" of these particular broadcasts was employed.⁴³ A form of notation was developed to represent their oral discourse on

⁴¹ Denis Tedlock, *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983, p.3.

⁴² I did, however, make limited use of a simplified form of content analysis in Chapter 5 of this thesis, by counting the number of times "God" was used by certain contributors to *Thought for the Day*. See: Arthur Asa Berger, *Media Analysis Techniques*, Revised Edition, London: Sage, 1991. "Content analysis is a research technique based upon measuring (counting) the amount of something in a random sampling of communication. The basic assumption implicit in content analysis is that an investigation of messages and communication gives insights into the people who receive these messages." p.92. This definition appears too narrow when placed alongside the discussion of how "qualitative content analysis" has developed by Peter Larsen in: K.B. Jensen & N.W. Jankowski, eds., *Qualitative Methodologies for Mass Communications Research*, 1991, Ch.6. See also, Arthur Asa Berger, *Media Research Techniques*, London: Sage, 1990, Ch.3. where he uses a similar definition of content analysis in this earlier text.

⁴³ For a discussion of a "discourse-analytical approach" see: Teun A. van Dijk, "Media Contents: The interdisciplinary study of news as discourse" in: K.B. Jensen & N.W. Jankowski, eds., *Qualitative*

paper.⁴⁴ Parallel to these critical tools, my training and experience in radio production also provided useful insights for analysing these and other recordings and interviews. This led to the tapes being carefully logged and then critically evaluated. The aim was to select extracts which represented the essence of the interviewee's case or broadcasting style.

A considerable amount has been written on *How to Read a Film*⁴⁵ or how to interpret the language and forms of television,⁴⁶ much less has been written about how to interpret the discourse of radio.⁴⁷ Some go so far as to argue that radio has yet to establish its own tools for analysis or "critical discourse".⁴⁸ This assertion will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2, but for the present it is important to note that the audio texts, the interviews and recordings of religious radio broadcasters will be treated as primary source material in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.⁴⁹ An analysis of selected

Methodologies for Mass Communications Research, 1991, Ch.5, p.108. *Enunciation* is helpfully defined by Larsen as "the specific modes in which cinematic and other texts address their audience. The assumption is that such modes of address serve to "situate" the addressee in a particular position vis-à-vis the media message. Thus, enunciation is said to play a crucial role in the very structuring of media content and the form in which it is understood." Chapter 6 of this thesis will partially focus on the way in which the radio preachers enunciate, or draw upon specific modes to address their audience. See Peter Larsen, "Media Contents: Textual Analysis of fictional media content", in: K.B. Jensen & N.W. Jankowski, eds., *Qualitative Methodologies for Mass Communications Research*, 1991, p.130.

⁴⁴ For outline and key to this notation see Chapter 6 section 2.iv of this thesis.

⁴⁵ James Monaco, *How to Read a Film - The Art, Technology, History and Theory of Film and Media*, (Revised Edition), New York: Oxford, 1981. Two points on radio in this text are particularly worthy of note: i) "The essential purpose of radio is not only to tell stories and convey information, but also to create a pervasive aural environment." p.375. ii) "Because there was no visual reality to distract from the story line, radio had a peculiar ability to compress narrative time and space." p.376. See also: Jill Nelmes, editor, *An Introduction to Film Studies*, London: Routledge, 1996.

⁴⁶ Keith Selby and Ron Cowdrey, *How to Study Television*, London: MacMillan, 1995; John Fiske and John Hartley, *Reading Television*, London and New York: Methuen, 1978; John Hartley, *Teleology - Studies in Television*, London: Routledge, 1992; Horace Newcomb, editor, *Television: The Critical View*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994; Nicholas Abercrombie, *Television and Society*, Oxford: Polity, 1996.

⁴⁷ A careful analysis of radio discourse such as: Erving Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1981, especially Chapter 5, "Radio Talk", was a rarity during the early 1980s. This is beginning to change with more recent texts such as: Paddy Scannell, editor, *Broadcast Talk*, London: Sage, 1991, especially Chapter 2 and 7, and Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, London: Edward Arnold, 1995, especially pp.142-149.

⁴⁸ Jacki Apple, "The Art of Radio", in *Radiotext(e)*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1993. Apple argues: "As an art form radio is in the toddler stage, radio art's parameters are still undefined and its practitioners have yet to establish a critical discourse." p.308

⁴⁹ Recordings will be treated as "primary texts" for this thesis. Denis Tedlock also uses this term; he argues that we should consider "everything" fixed on a tape as a "primary text". *ibid.*, p.4.

television extracts will provide the foundation for the discussion of elements of the audio-visual culture in Chapter 3.

At the heart of this thesis are a large number of audio-visual texts. The majority of these are audio-texts, based on original in depth interviews and radio broadcasts. It is the **broadcasters'** self-reflection and their radio work rather than the **audience's** interpretations which will be central to the discussion. This is a definite methodological choice aimed at creating a manageable research project. I am aware of the considerable shift in qualitative media/communication studies towards the audience and reception analysis,⁵⁰ the call by Stewart Hoover for a "religious anthropology of the audience",⁵¹ and the importance of "receptor-orientated" communication.⁵² These are all significant and tempting avenues to explore. They are, however, beyond the scope of this present thesis.

It remains important to evaluate critically the conception, creation/production and broadcasting/transference of broadcast material. This concentration upon the broadcasts will provide useful insights into the methodology employed by some religious broadcasters. It will be argued that this in turn also provides useful lessons for preachers. It is also indirectly relevant to audience reception as the texts studied represent examples of material which go to make up the hearer's communicative environment. In order to begin to answer the original question, it is important to

⁵⁰ See, for example, Michael R. Real, *Exploring Media Culture - A Guide*, London: Sage, 1996. Real argues: "Research on media culture has shifted away from a focus on one obvious mass medium, television, coming from "out there" to affect us, toward examining a range of media that we enter into in our daily life, a shift from sociological mass communication to personal media experience." p.xiii. For further work see also: i) Ien Ang, "The Nature of the Audience", in John Downing, Ali Mohammadi, and Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, *Questioning the Media - A Critical Introduction*, London: Sage, 1990, ch.10. ii) Klaus Bruhn Jensen, "Reception analysis: mass communication as the social production of meaning." in K.B. Jensen & N.W. Jankowski, eds., *Qualitative Methodologies for Mass Communications Research*, 1991, pp.135-148.

⁵¹ Stewart Hoover, "Media and the Religious Public Sphere", in Stewart Hoover and Knut Lundby, editors, *Media, Religion and Culture: Rallies, Rituals and Resistance*, London: Sage, 1997. See especially Hoover's section on: "Towards a Religious Anthropology of the Audience" pp. 287-8.

⁵² Viggo Sogaard, *Media in Church and Mission*, Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1993. "A receptor or audience orientation is a must for Christian communication. If we do not know our audience and the needs of our audience, we really have no right to be on air." p.139. This is a recurring theme through this text, which is supported by the theological belief that "God's approach is receptor-orientated."

analyse in detail examples of broadcast oral communication to see how more experienced broadcasters attempt to compete with a whole range of other audio-visual stimuli for their audience's attention.

iv. Personal Interest

My interest in this subject flows from many sources. Recently, producing *Garrison Keillor's Radio Preachers* for BBC Radio 4 reinforced my fascination with this topic. As both a radio producer and a homiletician I was intrigued by how speech radio and preaching interact.

More specifically, when I listened to many of America's radio preachers I was entranced, frustrated, amused and at times even bored. These two media, radio and preaching, often appeared incompatible. The result of an American southern preacher roaring into the microphone frequently seemed, at least to a British pair of ears, to be a communication failure. Nevertheless, as I became increasingly intrigued by their broadcasting, I expanded my research, interviews and listening in order to provide the basis for further written research.

At the same time as making this programme and expanding my research base, my sense of frustration at a communication mismatch was heightened by seeing a number of hugely popular movies. Films such as *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *Philadelphia* were apparent communication triumphs. They told a series of stories which held large and diverse audiences spellbound. The comparison between fifteen dollar radio shows and fifteen million dollar films may seem a little unfair. Nevertheless, these experiences, combined with a critical engagement with a number of American TV news and drama programmes, provoked me to reflect on a number of points.

First, within the West's audio-visually dominated culture where TV, film and increasingly computers appear to rule, what place remains for forms of communication which rely on oral discourse? Preaching looked particularly vulnerable. This led me,

secondly, to reflect upon speech radio, and even religious speech radio. In some contexts it had survived and even prospered, whilst in others it was in danger of extinction. The mixed fortunes of religious radio represent positive and negative examples of mediated oral communication which had weathered, to differing degrees of success, the media explosion epitomised by television. In consequence I asked, thirdly, what could preachers learn from these contrasting experiences in religious radio? This brief odyssey led to a clarification of three prime areas for research: radio, homiletics, and the point where they intersect. In order to make sense of these three extensive topics it was important to interpret them with special reference to their context: the "audiovisual culture".⁵³ Once these fields had been identified, the question of how to communicate orally in a society where a whole range of other audio-visual stimuli compete for the audience's or congregation's attention, took a more defined outline. It became clear that simple, yet imaginative, oral discourse may have an important role in creating alternative worlds to our audio-visual Babel.

A number of texts have led to further reflection on the contemporary relevance of the Babel story in Genesis.⁵⁴ The significance of this tale became clearer after a reading of Cardinal Carlo Martini's *Communicating Christ to the World* where he relates the Babel of Genesis 11: 1-9 to our own communicative environment. For Martini, Babel is:

the symbol of non-communication, of drudgeries and ambiguities that plague communication on this earth. Babel is also the symbol of a civilization in which the multiplication and confusion of messages leads to misunderstanding. From this an agonizing question is born: how to find in the Babel of today a true and *authentic communication* in which words, gestures and signs run along the right channels, are received and understood favorably [sic] and with right resonance? Is

⁵³ Henk Hoekstra and Marjeet Verbeek, "Possibilities of Audiovisual Narrative for Moral Formation", in Philip J. Rossi and Paul A. Soukup, *Mass Media and the Moral Imagination*, Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1994, p.215. "Audiovisual culture represents the culture of the masses." They use the term "audiovisual culture" throughout this article to describe our communicative environment.

⁵⁴ J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be - Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*, London: SPCK, 1995. "From Babel to Pentecost", pp.187-90.

it possible for us to meet each other in this Babel, to create even in a confused civilization places and modes of *authentic encounter*?⁵⁵

Martini's understanding of the Babel story is but one of a range of possible interpretations.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, for this author it highlights with prescience the importance of authentic communication and encounter. This remains one of the central goals of preaching. It is a mark of effective oral communication and is therefore a concern of this dissertation.

v. Thesis Statement

The central question of this thesis is how to communicate orally and effectively in a society where a whole range of other audio-visual stimuli compete for the audience's or congregation's attention. This is a problem faced by both preachers and radio broadcasters. These oral communicators have responded in a variety of ways to a rapidly evolving communicative environment. One of the contentions of this thesis is that preachers can learn both positive and negative lessons from the practice of religious radio broadcasters.

By focusing primarily on these radio communicators and their modes and manner of discourse, I wish to point, amongst other things, to the importance and complexity of pictorial language, the power of visual narrative, the uses of active and specific speech, and the dangers of insider-discourse. It will be argued that today's Babel like context demands a rediscovery and renewal of oralising skills, and a refining of the art of making pictures with words. This re-formation of orality will have the potential to engage not simply the visual imagination, but also the other imaginative senses. It is a

⁵⁵ Carlo Maria Martini, *Communicating Christ to the World*, translated by Thomas M. Lucas, Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1994, pp.5-6. (*Italics are mine*). He continues with these provocative questions: "Is it possible to communicate today in the family, in society, in the Church, in one's personal relationships? How can we be present in the world of mass media without being swept away by rivers of words and oceans of images? How can we educate ourselves for authentic communication in a world of mass communication and even "mass civilisation" ? "

⁵⁶ For contrasting interpretations see, for example, Claus Westerman, *Genesis 1-11, A Commentary*, translated by John J. Scullian, London: SPCK, 1984 (1974), pp. 553-556, and Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982, pp.97-102.

way of speaking which appeals multi-sensorially to the entire person, not simply to the intellect. It can therefore assist in the translation of written biblical texts into oral forms which will be able successfully to engage listeners at the end of the twentieth century. The result is a form of orality which has the potential to bridge the word-image divide, contribute to more authentic encounters between speakers and listeners, and so reflect the embodied communicative process upon which Christianity is founded.

Chapter 1. **Preaching in Crisis or Transition ?**

1. Introduction

It was previously suggested that both preachers and radio broadcasters face a simple, but crucial challenge: How do you communicate orally and effectively in a context where a whole range of other audio-visual stimuli compete for your listener's attention? This quandary of how to communicate with words in a "new communicative environment" ¹ has provoked a number of responses from theoreticians and practitioners in both homiletics and radio.

This first chapter will investigate two areas: first, the nature of the perceived crises in preaching, and secondly, the homiletical responses to some of the elements of these crises. It will be argued in the first section that an increased reliance upon and an exposure to audio-visual electronic stimuli may have contributed towards the perceived crises in preaching. ² One specific music video will be used to illustrate different aspects of these crises. It will be suggested that the language, form and ubiquity of television in particular may have undermined confidence in how preachers speak and how congregations now listen. For some scholars the simple answer to the question "to preach or not to preach?" is "not to preach", as the sermon is now perceived as an out-dated and "culturally" limited form of communication. ³

¹ Henk Hoekstra and Marjeet Verbeek, "Possibilities of Audiovisual Narrative" in Philip J. Rossi and Paul A. Soukup's (editors) *Mass Media and the Moral Imagination*, Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1994, p.213. They describe this context as the "audiovisual culture".

² This phrase, audio-visual electronic stimuli, will be used in this section to refer primarily to mass media communication technologies. In particular, it refers to television and film, though it could also refer to the rapidly expanding world of computer communication technologies. This last field is already a highly significant aspect of the current communication environment, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate the implications of electronic audio-visual stimuli identified in texts such as: Steven G. Jones, editor, *CyberSociety - Computer-Mediated Communication and Community*, London: Sage, 1995, and Rob Shields, editor, *Cultures of Internet - Virtual Spaces, Real Histories, Living Bodies*, London: Sage, 1996.

³ David C. Norrington, *To Preach Or Not To Preach? The Church's Urgent Question*, Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1996. He argues that sermons have little place in today's church: "Preachers today should be aware of the cultural limitations of their audience; there is no compelling reason to try to re-educate hearers to appreciate a popular method of yesterday." p.96.

For other scholars, the answer is “to preach”, but “to preach differently”, taking more notice of our communicative context. In the second section of this chapter it will be argued that there have been various attempts to develop revised approaches to preaching. These try in different ways to adapt to our changed communicative setting or what Paul Virilio characterised as “the *instantaneous ubiquity* of the audio-visual mix”.⁴ A number of transitions within the field of homiletics will be identified. It will be argued that some homileticians have drawn from the worlds of television and film to strengthen their revised approaches to preaching. By contrast, radio has largely been ignored. It will be asserted that aspects of the theory and practice of radio broadcasting also have much to offer preachers.

This theme will be further developed later in the thesis. For example, the second chapter will consider parallel, but not identical views about radio in this audio-visual environment: first, radio has also faced crises; secondly, it is in the process of a radical transformation, perhaps even a renaissance. It will also be implied in the second chapter that the ancient art of preaching has much to learn from the relatively recent craft of radio broadcasting, in particular, the art of creating pictures with words.

The perceived turn towards the visual in our culture,⁵ and what Ron Burnett describes as the “rapid spread of communication technologies”,⁶ has raised a number of options for those concerned with oral communication, and in particular for homileticians intent on communicating with words.⁷ One option would be to acknowledge this shift as a terminal crisis and abandon preaching as an outdated and

⁴ Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, translated by Julie Rose, London and Indianapolis: BFI and Indiana University Press, 1994, p.6.

⁵ See: Chris Jenks, editor, *Visual Culture*, London: Routledge, 1995, and Ron Burnett, *Cultures of Vision - Images, Media and the Imaginary*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995. Both texts provide useful discussions of the visual character of contemporary society. The cultural geographer, Kevin Robbins, argues that “new technologies have massively extended the range and power of vision, and also the techniques for processing and analysing visual information.” Kevin Robbins, *Into the Image*, London: Routledge, 1996, p.155.

⁶ Ron Burnett, *Cultures of Vision - Images, Media and the Imaginary*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995, p.228.

⁷ David Brindley, *Story, Song and Law - The Craft of Preaching in Today's Church*, Swindon: BFBS, 1996, p.2. Brindley outlines three options: i) ignore the problem, ii) compromise by turning sermons into “brief chats”, or, iii) enter into conspiracy of silence between the congregation and the preacher.

ineffective form of communication.⁸ A second, more optimistic option would be simply to highlight the areas where preaching is experiencing a renaissance and argue that these are successful models worth imitating.⁹ A third approach, and the one taken in this thesis, is to identify the “crisis” as a challenge to make a transition into new forms of oral communication.¹⁰ “Perhaps”, as Richard Ward argues, “we are *on the brink* of seeing a people of the page transformed into a people of the Word.”¹¹

In short, the first chapter will attempt to investigate a variety of diagnoses and prognoses for preaching, and to assess some of the proposed treatments. It will be argued that preaching is not in terminal decline, nor in serious trauma, but that there are various roads to full recovery and to transforming preachers from being “the people of the page” into “the people of the Word” who can speak effectively in an audio-visual culture. The route of learning from radio broadcasters has still to be fully explored by homileticians.¹² This is the primary area of enquiry in this thesis. Before it can be explicitly investigated, however, it is important to analyse the challenges facing preaching and some of the responses to these challenges.

⁸ See, for example, Graham Corneek, *Fieldwork Diary*, Unpublished project towards M.Th. at Edinburgh University, 1995. Corneek reflects on why he led his church in Deptford away from having a regular sermon, and replaced it with discussions or participatory drama.

⁹ Christopher Green and David Jackman, editors, *When God's voice is heard - Essays on preaching presented to Dick Lucas*, Leicester: IVP, 1995. This book begins with a success story in the form of an essay, “Preaching that shapes a ministry”, by Christopher Green. This describes the successful preaching ministry of Dick Lucas, the establishment of the Proclamation Trust, and the Cornhill Training Course. The implicit argument is that the style of preaching espoused by Dick Lucas has led to full churches, is faithful to the “sufficiency” of God’s word and should be imitated.

¹⁰ See also Chapter 7 of this thesis and Ellul’s call for “open” and “understandable” language in *The Humiliation of the Word*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1985, p.263.

¹¹ Richard Ward, “Beyond Televangelism: Preaching on the Pathway of Ritual Formation”, in Martha J. Simmons, editor, *Preaching on the Brink - The Future of Homiletics*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1996, p.122.

¹² See a three page article by the former Head of Religious Broadcasting for BBC World Service, Pauline M. Webb, “Preaching in the Media”, in *Epworth Review*, 1988, 15:3, pp.18-21. This is a rare and brief attempt to focus on the challenges facing those who “aspire to use these [radio and television] modern media as their pulpit”. p.18.

2. *Preaching in Crisis?*

Preaching is perceived to be facing a series of crises. Some scholars would still support the point made twenty years ago in the *Expository Times* that “we live in an age when preaching is out of favour.”¹³ Many people, both inside and outside the church, see preaching as an anachronistic and idiosyncratic form of communication, which has no use or relevance for the third millennium.¹⁴ Such views are articulated by Klaas Runia in *The Sermon Under Attack*.¹⁵ In this book, which began as lectures at Moore College, Sydney, he outlines certain “contemporary criticisms” of preaching from social scientists, communication experts, theologians and “the man and woman in the pew”.¹⁶ These categorisations, and his general portrayal of preaching as being “under attack”, appear to be a defensive ploy to provide him with a platform upon which to build his apologia for “relevant preaching”.¹⁷ Nevertheless, his approach does usefully highlight how some consider the sermon to be under attack from all sides.

The contention of this section is that three of the integral elements of preaching: the speech, the speaker, and the audience,¹⁸ or the “three constituents of the speech-act”,¹⁹

¹³ Editorial, “Preaching Today”, in *Expository Times*, 88: 1977, pp.237-238. This article identifies seven reasons for this assertion, including: “Some today question the effectiveness, even the possibility, of speaking intelligibly to a congregation consisting of persons with widely differing backgrounds, intelligence, education and religious experience. Is not discussion the only satisfactory way of education and communication?” p.237.

¹⁴ See: David C. Norrington, *To Preach or Not To Preach?* Paternoster: Carlisle, 1996. Norrington argues, ultimately unconvincingly, that the “regular sermon has no biblical basis” (p.69) and is only useful for communicating information (p.10). He asserts that sermons “were not a common occurrence” and those reported in the Old and New Testament were all “delivered on special occasions.” (p.115) New Testament Professor John O’Neill is also unconvinced by Norrington’s approach. He persuasively argues that: “paucity of reference to a practice” does not “mean that the practice” itself was not followed. (John O’Neill, “Private Review Memo” to Jolyon Mitchell, 6th June 1996, pp.1-7)

¹⁵ Klaas Runia, *The Sermon Under Attack*, (The Moore College Lectures - 1980), Exeter: Paternoster, 1983. He avoids assessing the relative weight of each critique. (Hereafter referred to as: Klaas Runia, *The Sermon Under Attack*.)

¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp.1-17.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, pp.73-96.

¹⁸ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, translated by George A. Kennedy, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991. “A speech [situation] consists of three things: a speaker and a subject on which he speaks and someone addressed”. Book 1 Chapter 3 p.47.

have been challenged by the advent of electronic audio-visual forms of communication.²⁰ The precise nature of the challenges will be discussed below. These challenges have led to what could be described as a three-fold crisis in preaching: a crisis of methodology and a crisis of listening, which in turn have contributed to the crisis of confidence in preaching. These crises strike at the communicative core of preaching: the speaker, the speech and the congregation/audience have each been influenced by a culture where a new language,²¹ based on electronic audio-visual stimuli, has become common parlance. The challenge brought by different forms of audio-visual discourse has the potential to influence the speaker, the audience and the speech. They can interrupt, distort or perhaps even improve the flow of communication within the preaching triad. Homileticians concerned with effective oral communication must take this electronic “noise” seriously,²² partially because it has the potential to influence each of these three elements of preaching.

It would be possible to conclude that the crises, partially brought about by the advent of electronic audio-visual stimuli, have permanently disrupted the communicative core of preaching, and have therefore become a block to effective oral communication. Viewed in this way, we might feel persuaded to agree with those who suggest that traditional forms of preaching have *no* future and argue that:

The pulpit monologue can no longer survive; we must find new forms which involve the congregation in participatory communication and which reach them through films, dance, and musical experiences that supplement, if not abolish, the spoken word.²³

¹⁹ George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980, p.68.

²⁰ This point could be put more explicitly in Aristotelian rhetorical terms to suggest that the logos of preaching, the ethos of the preacher and the pathos of the congregation have both individually and corporately been challenged by our increasingly audio-visually orientated culture.

²¹ Pierre Babin, *A New Era in Religious Communication*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990. The call for a new audio-visual language is a central theme in this text.

²² “Noise” is used here in terms of “communication theory” to mean something which interferes with the signal between “encoder and decoder”, and so makes accurate decoding more difficult. Tim O’Sullivan, John Hartley, Danny Saunders and John Fiske, *Key Concepts in Communication*, London and New York: Routledge, 1983.

²³ Ronald E. Sleeth, *God’s Word and Our Words, Basic Homiletics*, Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1986. p.27. It is clear from the entire text that Sleeth does not himself hold this view.

This thesis will attempt to demonstrate that this is an over-pessimistic view, and the “pulpit monologue” can survive. To “abolish” or abandon the spoken word is an over-reaction to the challenges posed by electronic audio-visual stimuli. Nevertheless, these challenges, brought about by the mass media, which face the three elements of preaching, cannot be ignored.

Take, for example, a comparatively recent modern pop video:

Papa don't preach.
 You always taught me right from wrong.....
 Papa don't preach.
 I've made up my mind.....
 Papa don't preach.²⁴

Madonna's 1986 hit song *Papa Don't Preach* highlights how the verb “preach” often now reverberates with negative associations.²⁵ This song illustrates how, in colloquial terms, the words “preach” or “preaching” have come to mean “to give unwelcome or unnecessary moral or religious advice.”²⁶ This negative connotation now attached to the word “preach” can even be heard within the context of Christian broadcasting.²⁷

²⁴ Madonna, *Papa Don't Preach*, from *The Immaculate Collection*, Warner Music Vision, 1990.

²⁵ For examples of negative connotations see: Nicholas Jones, *Soundbites and Spin Doctors - How politicians manipulate the media - and vice versa*. London: Cassell, 1995. He relates how in 1992 David Evans, a conservative MP, told the BBC Radio 4's *World at One* “that if ministers could not adhere to the ‘moral standards they are **preaching** at us every day’ then they ought not stay in office.” p.2. Or the labour politician Jack Straw interviewed on *Everyman* who asserted that he doesn't “want to **preach**” on issues of faith or morality within the political arena. Michael Roberts, producer, *Everyman - Vote, Vote, Vote for the Almighty*, London: BBC 1, 27 October 1996. Or the presenter John Humphreys, on Radio 4's *Today* programme, 18 January 1997, suggested that “**preaching**” to young people about ecstasy is clearly not the way to prevent drug abuse. Or Professor Patricia Williams, speaking about her approach in her 1997 Reith Lectures, *A Genealogy of Race - Towards a Theory of Grace*: “I don't want to **preach** solutions from on high, but I do believe that to a very great extent we dream our worlds into being: an optimistic course might be charted, if only we could imagine it.” *The Guardian*, 23 January 1997, G2, p.5. Or Dr David Starkey, on Radio 4's *Moral Maze*, 1 May 1997, where the word **preaching** was used at least six times during a debate on Children's Sex Education. Starkey told ‘witness’ Colin Heart: “You want **preaching** of a particular view!” and “You are ignoring the fact **preaching** does not change behaviour!”

²⁶ G.N. Garmonsway, compiler, *The Penguin English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., London: Penguin, 1969, p.550.

²⁷ London's new Christian radio station, Premier, insisted prior to its launch that it would “not be preaching to listeners”. Peter Meadows, the station's first chief executive argued “Premier will sound nothing like the common perception of American religious radio - no manic preachers, no pleas for money, no saccharine sentimentality.” *The Guardian*, 26 May, 1995, p.11.

The video provides a useful opening for investigating the homiletical crisis of confidence, the crisis in preaching methodology and the crisis in listening to preaching.

i. Audience: Crisis in Listening

The methods employed by the producers of *Papa Don't Preach*, highlight some of the issues pertinent to the fracturing of the communicative triad. The video itself lasts just over 5 minutes, but crams into this brief time over 60 shots. Many are rapidly juxtaposed with each other, telling the simple story of a young girl asserting her romantic independence, her right to have her baby and a middle-aged father unhappy at first with her "flight from the nest". Through flash-backs of an old cine-camera, we see how he affectionately remembers her as a toddler and is now torn by her growing up and her dilemma of becoming pregnant. He eventually backs down, and the final shots are of a reconciliatory embrace between father and daughter.

This is a familiar story brought to life with shots of the New York skyline, the Staten Island ferry and character close-ups. Interspersed throughout the video are brief extracts of Madonna, dressed alluringly, dancing and singing in a small darkened studio. These combine with the story-line to add pace and sensuality to the video. In many ways it could be described as a typical music video, especially in the way in which it attempts to stir the emotions or pathos of the audience through the rapid cutting, the juxtaposition of images, and the simple narrative structure.²⁸ Pat Aufderheide believes that:

One of music video's distinctive features as a social expression is its open-ended quality, aiming to engulf the viewer in its communication with itself, its fashioning of an alternative world where image is reality.²⁹

²⁸ "Pathos occurs as a mode of artistic proof when the souls of an audience are moved to emotion: they will come to a different conclusion, for example, when they are angry than when they are pleased." George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980, p.68.

²⁹ Pat Aufderheide, "Music Videos: the Look of the Sound", in *Journal of Communication* 36, 1986, pp.57-78. See also Pat Aufderheide, "The Look of Sound", in Todd Gitlin, editor, *Watching Television*, New York: Pantheon, 1986, pp.110-111.

Papa Don't Preach does fashion an alternative world where the electronic image **appears** to be reality. The images themselves give meaning to the lyrics, and offer a "gloss" on what is meant by the frequently repeated lyric "Papa Don't Preach." Interestingly, this particular video lacks the "open-ended quality" found in so many other music-videos, as the final hug between father and daughter brings a sense of closure. If this form of "engulfing" video is compared with a preacher's voice, a vast gulf between the two communication methodologies becomes apparent; even if they are both attempting, in radically different ways, to create an alternative world.³⁰ People brought up on such a style of television,³¹ may have difficulty attending to sermons which go beyond the language of MTV.³²

This form of entertainment has its own distinctive style, but it does employ, perhaps in a more heightened form, many of the standard tools of television.³³ In other words, certain characteristics of MTV, such as rapid cuts, fast camera angle switches, and reliance upon images to tell the story, are also true of other styles of more traditional television. It is as if television speaks the same root language, but expresses itself in different dialects. This basic homogeneity within the language of television adds weight to Leander Keck's assertion that it may also have undermined our ability to listen. Television, in his eyes:

..... has made it ever more difficult for people to attend carefully to merely verbal communication..... This loss of attentiveness to verbal

³⁰ See: Walter Brueggemann, "Preaching as Reimagination" in *Theology Today*, 1995, 52:2, pp.313-329. He argues that "the preacher must show how this counter-text of the gospel is a genuine alternative." p.321.

³¹ Quentin J. Schulze, et al., *Dancing in the Dark, Youth, Popular Culture and the Electronic Media*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991. (Hereafter referred to as Quentin J. Schulze, et al., *Dancing in the Dark*) See especially chapter 7, "Rocking to Images: The Music Television Revolution." By 1986 "MTV and its imitators reached 43 percent of all American teenagers every week.... By 1989, 47 million American homes received MTV." p.179

³² This has led some Christian communicators to attempt to translate biblical stories into the language of the music video as seen on MTV (Music Television). See, for example, *Out of the Tombs* a music video interpretation of Mark 5:1-12, produced by the American Bible Society. This project, and this video in particular, is discussed by Gregor Goethals in "Media Mythologies", in Chris Arthur, *Religion and the Media - An Introductory Reader*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993, p.36.

³³ The MTV style is a relatively new arrival as a form of TV. Raymond Williams' chapter on "The Forms of Television" in *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, New York: Schocken Books, 1975, fails to anticipate this development within his section on "new forms of television", pp.44-77.

communication, to oral discourse has eroded the place of the sermon.³⁴

For Keck the apparent demise of careful listening to oral discourse is but one of the “grave clothes” constricting today’s preacher.³⁵ This view, that audiences now struggle to concentrate as they listen to oral discourse, has found support more recently amongst homileticians on both sides of the Atlantic.

First, Michael Rogness, based at Luther North-western Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, argues that television “has produced a passive audience. We are used to listening with half an ear - easily distracted. Translate this to the church, and we have people in the pews who listen for a few minutes, then think about something else.”³⁶ Secondly, John Stott, based at All Souls, Langham Place, London, believes that “preachers have to reckon with a TV-conditioned congregation” and:

We have a colossal task on our hands if we hope to counteract the baneful tendencies of much modern television. We can no longer assume that people either want to listen to sermons, or indeed are able to listen. When they are accustomed to the swiftly moving images of the screen, how can we expect them to give their attention to one person talking, no frills, no light relief and nothing else to look at ?³⁷

In different ways Stott and Rogness highlight the rivalry between “the box and the pulpit”.³⁸ Whilst they avoid explicitly talking about a crisis in preaching, they acknowledge the challenge of image-driven television to the oral media of preaching.

³⁴ Leander E. Keck, *The Bible in the Pulpit - The Renewal of Biblical Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978, p.40.

³⁵ Leander Keck also argues that preachers have been affected by the “general revolt against authority”, the “incongruity between lived experience and orderly presentation of the sermon” and the “loss of certitude” concerning biblical authority. *ibid.*, pp.41-47.

³⁶ Michael Rogness, *Preaching to a TV Generation - The Sermon in the Electronic Age*. Lima, Ohio: CSS Publishing, 1994, p.29. “One of the results of passive listening is superficial listening.” See also Derek Weber, *Preaching To Be Heard in a Television Age*, Edinburgh Uni.: Unpub. Ph.D., 1993.

³⁷ John Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982, p.75. Stott had earlier pessimistically argued that TV has the tendency to make audiences physically lazy, intellectually uncritical, emotionally insensitive, psychologically confused, and morally disorientated. pp.70-72.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.69

The British preacher and theologian, Simon Vibert, goes further and argues:

television provides a threat to serious preaching..... [as] listening capacities are reduced because television has taught us to expect a frequent change in style of presentation - of presenter, scenery, topic - and this is to be accompanied by a rapid succession of visual images. Preaching, it is presumed, is too long and too dull in a TV age.³⁹

A further factor contributing towards the crisis in how we listen to preaching is the increased reliance upon the “zapper” or remote channel control. Bernard Reymond, a Professor of Practical Theology, is another European voice who highlights the way television has influenced how we listen. He believes that:

“Zapping” has become part of normal behaviour; in front of the TV, the average viewer switches from one channel to another immediately they feel bored; faced with a sermon from the pulpit, they still zapp around in their minds, letting it wander wherever it will.⁴⁰

Reymond also argues that television has not only changed how we listen, but also the expectations held about appropriate styles of discourse:

Today, television’s tendency to reduce the speech to the thirty-five second clip has accustomed us with the notion that we should be satisfied with a few moving passages; in ancient Greece the discourse was judged as a whole and critiqued by the high standards and with the discerning tastes of a rhetorically literate audience.⁴¹

The reductionist and fragmentary tendencies of television have, in Reymond’s eyes, therefore contributed to a change in listening habits and expectations. These changes have contributed to what could be described as the crisis of attention to preaching.

³⁹ Simon Vibert, *The Church in the Age of the TV Image - Dare we still preach?* - Orthos 12. Northwich, Cheshire: Fellowship of Word and Spirit, 1993, p.19. See also a briefer version of his argument in his article: “The Word in an Audio-Visual Age: Can we still preach the Gospel?” *Churchman*, Vol. 106, 1992:2, pp.147-158.

⁴⁰ Bernard Reymond, “Preaching and the New Media”, *Modern Churchman*, New Series, Vol.XXXIV, No.5, 1993, pp.19-29. He believes that “people are becoming trained by TV to share out their attention in quite new ways.” p.24.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, pp.21-2.

Like Stott and Rogness, Vibert and Reymond make persuasive cases. Many of their conclusions about the impact of television on listening, however, they leave unsubstantiated. Their assumptions about television and listening may not appear unreasonable, but their positions might have been strengthened by a closer analysis of specific audio-visual texts.⁴² Their approach towards television and listening echoes other assertions about the detrimental effects of television cited elsewhere in the academy.⁴³ In short, many homileticians concerned about communicating in an audio-visual age often argue that television has shortened our attention span. In the literature discussed to date, however, little empirical data is used to support these claims. The danger with such an approach is that it can too easily slide into an oversimplistic “direct effects” approach to television’s influence.⁴⁴

It is necessary to develop a more sophisticated understanding of how the audio-visually saturated environment, and television in particular, cultivates audiences into particular habits of attending, viewing and listening.⁴⁵ Such an approach recognises that “exposure to television programmes [and other media] will, over time, have a cumulative influence on viewers’ perceptions of the world and their place in it”.⁴⁶ The contention of this section is that the cumulative influence of the form and content of the electronic media has influenced how congregations now listen.

⁴² At times each of these four texts read as if the authors rarely engage in watching television.

⁴³ See, for example, Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, New York: Penguin, 1986 (1985); or Michael Novak, “Television Shapes the Soul”, in Horace Newcomb, editor, *Television - The Critical View*, Third Edition, Oxford: OUP, 1982, pp.335-350. (This is not in the 1994, Fifth Edition.) Novak argues that “television is a molder of the soul’s geography”, which speeds up the rhythm of attention, and therefore creates high expectations for audiences. pp.336 ff.

⁴⁴ There is a huge literature on media effects research, recent useful introductory texts include: Denis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory - An Introduction* (Third Edition) London: Sage, 1994, (see especially chapters 13 & 14); James Curran and Michael Gurevitch, *Mass Media and Society*, London: Edward Arnold, 1991, especially “On Understanding and Misunderstanding Media Effects” pages 235-266; and Shearon A. Lowery and Melvin L. DeFleur, *Milestones in Mass Communication Research - Media Effects*, Third Edition, White Plains, N.Y.: Longman, 1995.

⁴⁵ “Cultivation analysis looks at [television’s] messages as an environment within which people live, define themselves and others, and develop and maintain their beliefs and assumptions about reality.” Michael Morgan and Nancy Signorielli, “Cultivation Analysis: Conceptualization and Methodology”, in Signorielli, Nancy and Morgan, Michael, editors, *Cultivation Analysis: New Directions in Media Effects Research*, Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1990, p.18. See also Chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁴⁶ David Gauntlett, *Moving Experiences - Understanding Television’s Influences and Effects*, Acamedia Research Monograph 13, London: John Libbey, 1995, p.97.

It is not being argued that one single video, *Papa Don't Preach*, has altered how people listen; nor is it being asserted that the music video genre of television has necessarily changed attention habits. It is, however, being suggested that the repeated exposure to this "audio-visual tapestry",⁴⁷ of which this video is but one small example, has a cumulative influence on how audiences and congregations attend.⁴⁸ In other words, I am not disagreeing with the fundamental conclusions of scholars such as Reymond in this area, I am merely questioning the way in which they have been reached.⁴⁹

It is important to emphasise that a shared underlying assumption of each of these texts, also held by this author, is that television has not irrevocably undermined the ability to listen, but it has changed how people listen. This transformation has made the task of the preacher a harder one. Whichever approach is used to argue that television, and other electronic audio-visual stimuli, have changed and weakened congregations' ability to listen to the sermon, the sheer frequency with which this view has been asserted, has probably also contributed to the crisis in confidence felt by those preaching.

ii. Speaker: Crisis in Confidence?

Contrast the production values of the video *Papa Don't Preach* with those employed to produce an average sermon and it is clear that the preacher is now normally only an amateur in a world of professional communicators. She/he is no longer the only

⁴⁷ Gordon L. Berry and Joy Keiko Asamen, *Children and Television - Images in a Changing Sociocultural World*, London: Sage, 1993, p.1. Television is described as an "audiovisual tapestry on which is being woven a complex and ever-changing national and international set of images that are hung on the small screen for all to see."

⁴⁸ Consider with Chris Arthur and Pierre Babin, for example, the American teenager who has been raised amongst the clamour of the mass media and watched over 20,000 hours of television by age 16. C.Arthur, *Religion and the Media - An Introductory Reader*, Cardiff: University of Wales, 1993, p.13.

⁴⁹ My critique is primarily based upon the methodologies of homileticians, such as Reymond, Vibert and Stott, who appear to rely too heavily on a hypodermic needle model of communication. This is "a mechanistic and unsophisticated model of media-audience relationship, which sees the media as 'injecting' values, ideas and information into each individual in a passive and atomised audience, thereby producing a direct and unmediated effect." Tim O'Sullivan, John Hartley, Danny Saunders and John Fiske, *Key Concepts in Communication*, London: Routledge, 1983, p.105. See also Viggo Sogaard, *Media in Church and Mission - Communicating the Gospel*, Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1993, p.41. Sogaard uses a simple, but helpful diagram to illustrate the syringe model.

educated voice in the village or town.⁵⁰ The preacher is now but one voice amongst a multitude of others. He/she competes for an audience now confronted by a kaleidoscopic choice of audio-visual media. The freedom of the individual to choose which voice, if any, to listen to is epitomised by Madonna's "I've made my mind up" line in *Papa Don't Preach*. These developments have further contributed to the authority of the preacher being undermined.

This is a point that the homiletician Fred Craddock makes in his frequently cited book, *As One Without Authority*.⁵¹ This text made a notable impact in the early 1970s and continues to exert an influence over homiletical discussions.⁵² Part of the reason for this was the way Craddock spoke to what some homileticians described as an "anti-authoritarian age".⁵³ He pertinently emphasised how the *questioning* of authority had brought "about a new relationship between speaker and listener".⁵⁴ In a way parallel to the daughter's assertion of her independence from her father's authority in *Papa Don't Preach*, so listeners have asserted their freedom from the traditional authority of the preachers in their pulpits "six feet above contradiction".

Part of the genius of Craddock's approach is that he appears to have anticipated some of the discussions surrounding post-modernism where certain scholars argue that we now operate with a more "playful, less authoritative, less authority-bound tone" to discourse.⁵⁵ Craddock considered many of the implications for preachers of this "less

⁵⁰ See: Derek Weber, *Preaching To Be Heard in a Television Age*, Edinburgh Uni.: Unpub. Ph.D., 1993, chapter 1 for a similar point made more extensively.

⁵¹ Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1971.

⁵² Gail O'Day, and Thomas G. Long, (eds.), *Listening to the Word - Studies in Honor of Fred B. Craddock*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1993. See also Eslinger, R.L., editor, *Intersections - Post-Critical Studies in Preaching*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994. For many homileticians *As One Without Authority* was a "word in season", following on from the anti-authoritarian movements of the 1960s. It is important therefore to read it in its historical and social context. *People's Century*, BBC 1, 19 January 1996, provides a useful insight into how "thousands of young people rebelled against the stifling morality of their parents' generation and began questioning traditional authority figures." Julie Myerson, *The Observer Life*, 19 January 1996, p.76.

⁵³ Editorial, "Preaching Today", in *Expository Times*, 88: 1977, pp.237-238. "We live in an anti-authoritarian age and a society which is aggressively egalitarian. We have come to suspect the "expert". Thus the parson in the pulpit is felt to belong to a by-gone age and to be opposed to values which are held dear by Christians as well as humanists." p.237.

⁵⁴ Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1971, p.14.

⁵⁵ Dick Hebidge, *Hiding in the Light*, London: Comedia - Routledge, 1988, pp.225-226.

authoritative” context and the ensuing “new relationship” between speaker and audience.

The words of the preacher are now more likely to be tested for credibility and relevance, by congregations increasingly informed and entertained by other sources of communication. The way in which Christianity itself has, according to Jürgen Moltman, “faced a growing crisis of relevance and credibility” since the Second World War,⁵⁶ has undoubtedly also contributed to the questioning of the authority, and perhaps also the ethos, of the preacher.⁵⁷

It is possible that the crisis of “credibility and relevance” of Christianity in the West may influence how the “ethos” or good character of a preacher is perceived. If the “logos” or word of the preacher is deemed to be *incredible* and *irrelevant*, then this may undermine the ethos of the speaker. If, because of the multiplicity of views now to be seen and heard through the mass media, the content of the message is evaluated as suspect, then the speaker may also be judged negatively. The result of such a movement will further undermine the confidence in the preacher and his/her preaching.

One image used by the New Testament scholar, Leander Keck, powerfully illustrates the argument up to this point. Keck draws on the powerful Johanne image of Lazarus, “bound with bandages and his face wrapped with a cloth”, to symbolise the “plight of the preacher and preaching today”.⁵⁸ He suggests that “one still detects widespread dismay over the state of preaching. Preachers themselves often admit that this element of their vocation is in general disarray.....”⁵⁹ Keck’s analysis of the crisis within preaching focuses primarily on the appropriate use of the bible. He begins, however, by

⁵⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, London: SCM, 1974 (1973), p.8.

⁵⁷ Ethos is understood in the Aristotelian sense in this context: “*Ethos* is the personal character of the speaker as seen in the speech; the orator should seem to be a good man and one who can be trusted. In Aristotle’s view ethos should be accomplished through the speech and not by matter of authority or the previous reputation of the orator.” George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980, p.68.

⁵⁸ Leander E. Keck, *The Bible in the Pulpit - The Renewal of Biblical Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978, p.38 and John 11:44. (Hereafter Leander E. Keck, *The Bible in the Pulpit*.)

⁵⁹ Leander E. Keck, *The Bible in the Pulpit*, p.39.

arguing that “many preachers have lost confidence in the importance of preaching.”⁶⁰ He believes that television may be partially to blame for this crisis in confidence.

Not all homileticians however are pessimistic about the future of preaching, nor do they all lack confidence in its importance. Jay Adams, for example, argues passionately that: “the present crisis in preaching need not, indeed *must* not, be permitted to continue.”⁶¹ In his forceful book on *Preaching With Purpose - The Urgent Task of Homiletics*, he argues that: “Men and women (and especially young people) are being turned away from Christ and His church by dull, unarresting, unedifying, and aimless preaching.”⁶² Such language is uncompromising, and illustrates how preaching is perceived to be in crisis even from within different parts of the church. It also highlights the concern for a method of preaching which is lively, relevant and engaging.

iii. Speech: Crisis in Method ?

For some homileticians, preaching is facing a methodological crisis. The contention of this section is closely related to the first two. It has been claimed that certain homileticians have suggested that frequent exposure to electronic audio-visual stimuli, epitomised by television, has led many people to listen less attentively to sermons⁶³ and also to have less confidence in the act of preaching.⁶⁴ This has been described as a crisis in listening and a crisis in confidence. This section will first consider the perceived transformations in forms of orality and discourse, and then secondly, it will

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.40.

⁶¹ Jay E. Adams, *Preaching With Purpose - The Urgent Task of Homiletics*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1982, p.xi.

⁶² *ibid.*, p.xi.

⁶³ See: Lewis G. Higdon, *Simply Preaching*, Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1995. Higdon argues: “Competition from television accompanied by a limited attention span has killed long sermons. Many people have the Radio 4 “Today” syndrome - where they have got used to listening to one news item after another, each never lasting more than two minutes, and with the thirty second commercial - these have taken their toll on the sermon.” p.5. [Note: Some *Today* features last for 3 or 4 minutes.]

⁶⁴ Donald Coggan, *The Sacrament of the Word*, London: Fount, 1987. Coggan’s memorable story of a church without a permanent pulpit and a wobbly little stand in its place illustrates how some clergy see no need for a pulpit or a traditional sermon. pp.24-5. This story also highlights how some preachers have lost confidence in the role of preaching.

be argued that certain homileticians have asserted that these transformations have led preaching to a methodological crisis.

One significant transformation of orality has been identified by Kathleen Hall Jamieson in her fascinating text on *Eloquence in an Electronic Age*. She argues that:

Television has changed public discourse dramatically. Increasingly, eloquence is visual, not verbal. Where once we expected messages laced with impassioned appeals, now we respond positively to a cooler, more conversational art; where once audiences expected to be conquered by an art bent on battle, today's television viewer expects instead an intimate rhetoric of conciliation.⁶⁵

Even if Jamieson's assertions are only to some extent correct, and eloquence is gradually becoming more visual and conversational, then this "democratisation" of discourse⁶⁶ also has serious implications for preachers.

Other writers argue that there is a sense in which a more colloquial and spontaneous style of orality is now expected from speakers. Alyce McKenzie, for example, believes that:

..... evidence is growing that our society is shifting from a literate to a postliterate or "secondary orality culture".⁶⁷ For several centuries we have prized the memorable, formal, respectable qualities of written discourse. Now we are shifting to one that prefers communications that epitomize the colloquial, seemingly spontaneous character of oral communication.⁶⁸

If these two analyses are correct, then they have significant implications for preaching methodology. A sermon which is constructed as a written text may display literary

⁶⁵ Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Eloquence in an Electronic Age - The Transformation of Political Speechmaking*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p.44.

⁶⁶ See: Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, London: Edward Arnold, 1995, on "Democratisation" of media discourse, p.148-9.

⁶⁷ McKenzie here puts into inverted commas Walter Ong's phrase of "secondary orality culture". She does not cite Ong, but appears to have been influenced by him in her discussion of "orality and the recovery of the proverb." Walter Ong's work is discussed in detail in chapter 7 of this thesis.

⁶⁸ Alyce M. McKenzie, *Preaching Proverbs - Wisdom for the Pulpit*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1996, p.xix.

lucidity, but may lack the apparent spontaneity or colloquialisms necessary for oral communication.⁶⁹ It will be suggested in later chapters of this thesis that many of the best religious radio broadcasters made or make use of a seemingly conversational form of secondary orality.⁷⁰ They have much to teach preachers constricted by their reliance on a written text which would be better “read, silently, by the eye”, than “heard by the ear”.⁷¹ The shift towards a more conversational form of public discourse on television and radio is one factor, therefore, which has contributed to the crisis of methodology in preaching. It is by no means the only factor.

Homiletician and pastor, Richard Eslinger, also believes that “Preaching is in crisis”.⁷² He believes that whilst the “way out, toward new effectiveness in preaching is not yet clear”, the “old/topical approach to preaching is critically, if not terminally ill.”⁷³ Significantly, in *A New Hearing*, he does not argue that preaching itself is “terminally ill”, rather it is the “old conceptual” approach which is suffering sickness, perhaps unto death.⁷⁴ It would be more precise, therefore, to summarise Eslinger’s opening premise as: preaching is in the midst of a methodological crisis.

Homileticians have interpreted this methodological crisis in a variety of ways. As demonstrated above, some have pointed towards transformations of orality, whilst others have highlighted the outdated “old conceptual” approach to preaching. Klaas Runia initially argues, in *The Sermon Under Attack*, that the “future of the sermon does not look very bright”.⁷⁵ Part of the reason for such a pessimistic diagnosis is

⁶⁹ This is a danger identified by many homileticians. See, for example, G. Robert Jacks, *Just Say the Word! Writing for the Ear*, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1996; or Richard Carl Hoefler, *Creative Preaching and Oral Writing*, Lima, Ohio: C.S.S. Publishing Company, published date not in text.

⁷⁰ See, for example, discussions of Ronald Selby Wright in Chapter 4, and Rabbi Lionel Blue in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

⁷¹ G. Robert Jacks, *Just Say the Word! Writing for the Ear*, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1996, p.1.

⁷² Richard L. Eslinger, *A New Hearing - Living Options in Homiletic Method*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987, “Preaching is in crisis. This awareness has been with us for some time now, reducing pastoral morale and congregational fervor.” p.11.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p.11.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p.11, and see Section II “Preaching in Transition”.

⁷⁵ Klaas Runia, *The Sermon Under Attack*, p. 14.

based on various communication theorists' critiques. For example, he quotes H.D. Bastian, a German scholar, who argues that preaching "is like using a kerosene lamp in the age of electric light".⁷⁶ This is, however, a double-edged portrayal of preaching, as a kerosene lamp may be dated, but it still can provide relief from the glare of fluorescent tubes, add to the atmosphere of a room, and supply illumination in a power-cut. Despite its ambiguities, this image illustrates how preaching is currently viewed as an anachronistic method of communication. For some critics it may be running out of fuel.

This is highlighted by the often repeated critical assertion that preaching is a monologue,⁷⁷ in an age more used to dialogue and discussion.⁷⁸ A preacher can be caricatured as little more than a "talking head" murmuring in an empty church competing with the more "eye-catching" methods employed by today's highly skilled television and film producers.⁷⁹ The theologian, Amos Wilder, paints an evocative picture: "The preacher, we are told, is like a man speaking into a dead microphone."⁸⁰

One of the characteristics of music videos such as *Papa Don't Preach* is their lack of explicit "preaching". Instead, they sometimes tell a story through images, or more often work in a "non-narrative form" and "rely on *mood* and *emotion*", avoiding abstract verbal concepts.⁸¹ The language spoken here is a visual one. Tom Freston, MTV president, said of his own channel that: "When you get down to it, the only thing we have is image".⁸² In this context he emphasises the power of the image, and not the word to "catch an audience".

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p.9. Runia cites H.D. Bastian, *Verkündigung und Verfremdung*, 1965, pp.58ff.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, pp.9-10. Runia cites R.E.O. White's memorable phrase that a sermon is "a monstrous monologue by a moron to mutes" from *A Guide to Preaching*, 1993, p.5.

⁷⁸ D. Stephenson Bond, *Interactive Preaching*, St. Louis, Missouri: CBP, 1991. He argues that the "height" of the pulpit and "distance" from the pew represents the gulf between speaker and listener. This gap leaves preachers "blind, deaf and apathetic, it will soon leave us mute. Burnout is an apt metaphor. The fuel is spent, the fire grows cold. Alone in our preaching, there is no fuel to build a new fire." p.4.

⁷⁹ See Chapter 3 of this thesis for specific examples of such caricatures.

⁸⁰ Amos N. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1964, pp.1-2.

⁸¹ Quentin J. Schulze, et al., *Dancing in the Dark*, p.192, from "sayings of Bob Pittmann", MTV chair.

⁸² Quentin J. Schulze, et al., *Dancing in the Dark*, p.178.

Interestingly, Fred Craddock argued in the early 1970s that speech, and in particular words have lost much of their former power.⁸³ Part of the reason for this is that now the “eyes and ears have no relief” from bombardment by the media.⁸⁴ The babel of words which now flood our imaginations limit our openness to words of significance. Moreover, our modern culture may be “favoring the eye over the ear.” This “visually orientated world”,⁸⁵ may also have further undermined the power of words. It is possible that this shift has also transformed the function of words. Kathleen Hall Jamieson believes that:

When visual images can communicate meaning instantaneously to individuals of different languages and faiths around the world, the function of words changes. In such a world, words contextualize pictures and specify desirable or practical courses of ensuing action.⁸⁶

Both Jamieson and Craddock appear more penetrating and prophetic than either Stott or Runia,⁸⁷ in their consideration of the methodological implications of this transformed cultural setting.⁸⁸ Part of the reason for this perceptiveness is not only their reflection on how words have lost some of their original power, but also their serious engagement with the apparent visual turn in communication.⁸⁹ The

⁸³ Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1971, p.5.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p.6.

⁸⁵ See: Richard L. Eslinger, “Fred Craddock - The Inductive Method in Preaching” in *A New Hearing - Living Options in Homiletical Method*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987, pp.95-132, esp. p.98.

⁸⁶ Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Eloquence in an Electronic Age - The Transformation of Political Speechmaking*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p.126.

⁸⁷ It is important to recognise that whilst Stott and Runia identify “contemporary objections” to preaching, they avoid relegating it to the communications dustbin. It is clear from both *I Believe in Preaching* and *The Sermon Under Attack*, that whilst they acknowledge a crisis of confidence in aspects of the homiletical method, they have no wish to abandon preaching itself. As apologists for preaching they do portray preaching as embattled; though ultimately both texts read more like a summon to arms, than a call to surrender. They are attempting, in different ways, to effect a renewal in confidence in preaching.

⁸⁸ Stott and Runia also point their readers towards the importance of engaging in real depth with the challenges posed by the communications evolutions. Unfortunately, they fail both to consider in detail the methodological implications of these technological transformations for homileticians, and to engage rigorously with other communication scholars /practitioners beyond the work of Marshall McLuhan. Neither of their texts make reference to examples of television or video, and there is no reason to believe that analysis of specific audio-visual texts would have radically influenced their arguments.

⁸⁹ See: Michael Warren, *Communications and Cultural Analysis - A Religious View*, Westport, Connecticut: Bergin and Garvey, 1992, p.68. Warren argues: “with film, television and print technology allowing the cheap reproduction of multi-colour graphics, almost all in the post-industrial

multiplicity of images used in *Papa Don't Preach* is but one example of how electronic images are increasingly drawn upon to entertain, to inform and even to educate. This fact has contributed to the crises in both methodology and in listening, which have in turn added to a crisis in confidence in preaching.

One response to such an analysis is to withdraw from preaching, and concentrate on pastoral care, small discussion groups or liturgical and musical excellence. A different, more positive response is to argue that our communicative context raises not only challenges, but also new opportunities for preachers. If, as homiletician Rodney Kennedy argues, "Christian preaching faces a perpetual crisis",⁹⁰ then there are lessons to be learnt from the history of how preaching has adapted to previous transformations in the communicative environment.⁹¹ The advent of the printing press, for example, could have been seen as a direct challenge to preaching.⁹² Instead, for reformers, such as Martin Luther,⁹³ it became an important tool for facilitating both the wider dissemination of their sermons and the education of their literate listeners, who could have read the biblical texts for themselves before hearing the sermon. Similarly, the advent of electronic audio-visual stimuli could be seen as dealing a fatal blow to preaching. The contention of this thesis is that our changed context does not toll the death-bell for the sermon. Rather, it provides new challenges and opportunities for preachers who are willing to engage critically with our communicative setting.

West are immersed in images. Society is so much awash in them that the prevalence of images is a dominant characteristic of our time."

⁹⁰ Rodney Kennedy, *The Creative Power of Metaphor*, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1993, p.1. Kennedy believes that "the crisis of preaching has been expressed" in a variety of ways: "...as secularism vs. supernaturalism, liberalism vs. conservatism, science vs. poetry, concept vs. symbol, rationality vs. irrationality, and secular vs. sacred." p.8. (endnote 1)

⁹¹ Derek C. Weber, *Discerning Images - The Media and Theological Education - Resources for Theological Educators*, Edinburgh: CTPI, 1991. See "The Church's Use of the Media", pp.8-9. Weber focuses on the significance of the printing press for the Reformation.

⁹² *ibid.*, p.9. See: Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge: Canto, 1983, especially chapter 6, "Western Christendom disrupted: resetting the stage for the Reformation", pp.148-186.

⁹³ See, for example, Martin Luther, *Luther's Works - Sermons 1*, Volume 51, translated and edited by John W. Doberstein, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959. It contains a select 43 sermons, compared to the two thousand recorded in the Weimar edition.

This historical and positive perspective on the place of preaching provides a solid foundation for interpreting the crises caused by the advent of electronic audio-visual stimuli. It is important to recognise that the question of how to hold people's attention with words in an increasingly audio-visual culture is but one of many critical questions which preaching has faced. Recently many homileticians have recognised this fact and have argued that preaching is in the midst of a transitional moment.

In this first section it has been argued that preaching is perceived by many commentators to be facing a series of crises partially as a result of the communications media. First, it was argued that preachers face a challenge of speaking to an easily distracted audience, most of whom are no longer accustomed to listening to one speaker for long periods of time. Secondly, it was suggested that preachers face a crisis of confidence in preaching, when so many other forms of electronic communication are competing for their listeners' attention. Thirdly, it was argued that various transformations in orality, partially brought about by the discursive practices commonly employed on television and radio, challenge methods of preaching nurtured within a literary culture. Underlying this discussion was the assertion that these crises do not necessarily demand the abandonment of preaching as a tool for Christian communication; they do, however, demand new approaches in preaching. The second section will consider a number of examples of homileticians wrestling with the implications of this new communicative context.

3. Preaching in Transition?

Behind the first section of this chapter was the question: "In a society where a range of electronic audio-visual stimuli regularly bombard many listeners' imaginations, how do you hold a congregation's attention with words?" This is one of the most pressing challenges facing homileticians today. It has been argued that preachers now face a number of challenges, but that this challenge in particular has contributed to the crises of listening, confidence and speaking. These apparent crises have led to the

development of a variety of new approaches to the art of preaching.⁹⁴ This section will analyse a number of these approaches.

A central assumption behind many of these homiletical methods is that “television and motion pictures have shaped a visually orientated generation”.⁹⁵ Our audio-visual culture is like a wall of television monitors playing out many different scenes - it has many faces. This section will therefore identify three aspects of this audio-visual context, and explore the ways in which certain leading homileticians have attempted to relate their approaches to this rapidly evolving communicative environment. Finally, it will be suggested that not only television and film, but also radio broadcasting may have lessons to teach homileticians.

i. From Static Points to Imaginative Moves

One transformation which may have contributed to the changes in how audiences attend and the development of homiletical method, could be highlighted by contrasting the Lumière brothers' earliest film shots in 1895 with recent action movies such as *Braveheart*, *Batman and Robin*, and *The Lost World*. This first film, *La Sortie des ouvriers de l'usine Lumière*, was made by a stationary camera as workers left the Lumières' factory.⁹⁶ The result resembles a static picture with moving figures on it. The current movie and video industries, exemplified by the “action adventure” genre and *Papa Don't Preach*, rely on very different techniques. Tight editing and rapid cuts combine with movements of camera angles to allow viewers to gaze or to see and hear far more than they ever could without the camera's aid.⁹⁷ In other words there has been an important shift in how cameras capture a scene on film. In

⁹⁴ Richard L. Eslinger, *A New Hearing*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1987, for a clear exposition of new movements within homiletics. (Hereafter referred to as: Richard L. Eslinger, *A New Hearing*)

⁹⁵ Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Imagery for Preaching*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989, p.21.

⁹⁶ Lumière film “Sortie d'Usine” (1895), in *Early Cinema, Primitive and Pioneers*, a B.F.I. video.

⁹⁷ There is an extensive literature discussing issues of spectatorship, gaze and moving pictures. See for example, Norman K. Denzin, *The Cinematic Society - The Voyeur's Gaze*, London: Sage, 1995: “....the motionless gaze of the picture was replaced by the moving picture of the cinema. This allowed the viewer to engage the subject of the gaze in real life detail; in the detail which accompanies movement through time and space.” p.26.

the earliest days of cinema scenes were recorded by a static camera. As the technology developed, this practice rapidly changed as film-makers experimented with cameras placed on the back of trains, in balloons, and on cars. Cameras were no longer locked to a single, static location. Today film makers and television directors often have a vast range of choice of angles or movement. Viewers have been conditioned to expect variety, speed and motion of shots.

The point being made is not simply that preaching is now set in a highly competitive communicative environment, but that a speaker who acts like one of the earliest cameras in his/her discourse and adopts a single, static or fixed point of view may seem slow and turgid to an audience more used to rapid shifts in viewing angles.⁹⁸ Leading homiletician, David Buttrick, frequently highlights the significance of such movement in preaching and the shift from static to roaming cameras. In *Homiletic*, for example, he argues that:

In an earlier era, movie directors worked with a fixed-location camera and moved actors around in front of the lens. Once upon a time the procedure was considered reality, but now when we view old films on late-night TV, they seem stilted and quite unreal. Today directors use a camera on a moving boom so that camera angles change, lenses widen or narrow, distances vary, imitating the actual way we perceive reality..... Twentieth-century consciousness views the world from many different standpoints.⁹⁹

On the basis of this change in perception Buttrick argues for a similar development in approaches to making moves within preaching.

⁹⁸ David G. Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures*, London: SCM, 1987, "Preaching that talks objectively about everything, as if from a third-person observational position, will not only seem archaic but may have an aura of unreality." p.56. (Hereafter referred to as: David G. Buttrick, *Homiletic*)

⁹⁹ David G Buttrick, *Homiletic*, p.55, see also his "Preaching to the "Faith" of America," in Leonard I. Sweet, editor, *Communication and Change in American Religious History*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993. p.316., and his "On Doing Homiletics Today" in Richard L. Eslinger's, editor, *Intersections - Post-Critical Studies in Preaching*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994. See also Chapter 3 of this thesis.

It is significant, however, that Buttrick himself does not uncritically adopt and translate cinematic techniques in his methodology for movement in sermons. He argues that speakers to large groups wishing to effect successful moves need to take time with their transitions:

Group consciousness simply cannot handle rapid shifts in subject matter. To move along from subject to subject every few sentences would “freak out” an audience; the effect would be similar to watching a movie film that has been speeded up many times the normal frames per minute. Minds will wander when pace is intense.¹⁰⁰

Buttrick may draw upon film analogies to support his case, but he does not go so far as to argue that preachers should mimic cinematic devices such as rapid camera movement and swift point-of-view moves in their oral discourse. It is clear from this that he has a clear understanding of the distinction between oral and other audio-visual forms of communication. This can also be seen by the way in which he draws extensively upon the image of a photographic camera to consider point-of-view in moves, and how to vary “focal field, lens depth and focal depth” in preaching.¹⁰¹

Buttrick’s use of cinematic and photographic analogies in *Homiletic* demonstrates a sensitivity to his communicative context. He is aware that listeners are used to a range of electronic communication. Whilst these modern media appear to have influenced the development of some of his homiletical theories, it is clear that he is cautious and critical in the lessons he applies from visual media to oral communication. This thoughtful approach, which recognises the fundamental differences between preaching and modern media, also serves as a useful warning to those seeking to glean homiletical lessons from religious radio broadcasting.

David Buttrick does represent, however, a good example of one leading homiletician who has attempted to integrate some developments in communication with his

¹⁰⁰ David G. Buttrick, *Homiletic*, p.25.

¹⁰¹ David G. Buttrick, *Homiletic*, “Alterations in focal field, lens depth, and focal depth can be managed with ease. Thus we can widen or narrow focus without much difficulty, although we cannot include more than one such alteration in any single move.” p.63. See Chapter 4 of this thesis for a demonstration of this approach used in analysing radio discourse.

homiletical method. A good test of his approach, is to reflect on how Buttrick's methodology might work out in practice. Consider, for example, the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37), where the story could be retold from a variety of angles. By persuading the listener to stand by the listening lawyer, walk with the religious professionals and lie in the ditch with the mugged traveller the preacher can provide provocative insights into this story.¹⁰² Even a view from the inn might elicit a new response to this familiar parable. Richard Eslinger argues persuasively that:

Shifts in character point of view, as with the parable of the good Samaritan, are rich with potential for new insight and even new hearings of the biblical narrative.¹⁰³

Such shifts from one point-of-view to another are by no means a new homiletical technique. The danger, however, of being locked into one viewpoint remains. On the basis of Buttrick's argument, this could be described as a **single fixed-camera approach**, which merely allows the characters to pass across the screen of the imagination, or simply views the entire story from one perspective. This will also limit the story's potential power for multi-angle conditioned listeners. A different form could be described as a **multi-camera approach**. If sensitively handled, this could lead listeners into and through a story and so allow them to experience its movement, and its depth.¹⁰⁴

For Buttrick the power lies not in discovering and making a single point in three different ways, but rather in enabling listeners to move through the story itself and so

¹⁰² See: Robert W. Funk, *Parables and Presence: Forms of the New Testament Tradition*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982, pp.55-65. Funk suggests that this parable should be interpreted from the perspective of the victim (the "fellow in the ditch") and not the good Samaritan. See also J.I.H. McDonald's useful article: "The View from the Ditch - and other Angles. Interpreting the Parable of the Good Samaritan", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 49.1.1996, pp.21-37. McDonald imaginatively explores how the "placing of the auditors" may change the meaning of the parable. p.29.

¹⁰³ Richard L. Eslinger, *Narrative and Imagination - Preaching the Worlds that Shape Us*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, p.145.

¹⁰⁴ See: Richard L. Eslinger, *Narrative and Imagination - Preaching the Worlds that Shape Us*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995. In his section on "The User's Guide to Imagery", he helpfully divides various approaches to using images in preaching into: The camera model, the video-camera model and the simulator model. pp.146-151. See also, David Buttrick, *Homiletic*, p.63.

encounter its original force afresh. This multi-camera approach appears to have the potential to engage, even empower, listeners who are used to frequent changes of points of view in the cinema or in front of the small screen. The result may more closely reflect what Mary Boys describes as “a parabolic form of teaching”,¹⁰⁵ which will draw listeners into “alternative” imaginings.¹⁰⁶

It has been implied in this section that Buttrick’s argument, characterised as the move from a single fixed-camera form of preaching to a multi-camera approach to preaching, is robust, especially, when it is recognised that both cinematographic and photographic developments have ensured that listeners are now used to viewing from a number of perspectives. Given that this is the case, then a form of orality that offers listeners a variety of perspectives is more likely to assist in countering the crisis of listening discussed earlier. Buttrick is also correct in not aligning his homiletical method too specifically with the language and forms of films, television, or photography. A medium, such as radio, which relies primarily upon words offers more obvious parallels with preaching.

ii. From Monologue to Conversation

It was suggested in the first part of this chapter that in some circles there is a crisis of confidence in the efficacy of preaching. One reason for this is neatly summarised by Walter Brueggemann: “Ours is a changed preaching situation,” where “the old modes of church absolutes are no longer trusted”.¹⁰⁷ It has been argued that for many

¹⁰⁵ Mary C. Boys, “Parabolic Ways of Teaching” in *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 1983, 13:3, pp.82-9. Boys argues that: “Jesus spoke in parables because abstract, conceptual language inadequately conveyed the reorientation entailed in living in God’s reign. The parables provided a means of engaging his hearers, involving them in a new way of thinking, and pressing them to a decision without provoking defensiveness.” p.86.

¹⁰⁶ See: Walter Brueggemann, “Preaching as Reimagination” in *Theology Today*, 1995, 52:2, pp.313-329. “The work of preaching is an act of imagination, an offer of an image through which perception, experience, and finally faith can be reorganised in alternative ways.” p.323.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p.313. He continues: “It is not that the church’s theological absolutes are no longer trusted, but that the *old modes* in which those absolutes have been articulated are increasingly suspect and dysfunctional. That is because our old modes are increasingly regarded as patriarchal, hierarchical, authoritarian, and monologic.”

listeners the single voice attempting to speak authoritatively from the pulpit has lost much of its power. In short, in our transformed preaching situation the sermon delivered as a closed monologue will often fail to connect with listeners.

Another reason for this increased suspicion towards oral monologues, is to be located in the forms of today's electronic media. Television often thrives on conflict and disagreement. At the heart of the music video *Papa Don't Preach*, for example, is the conflict between daughter and father. In discussion or news programmes producers are expected to represent opposing views and so create dialogue, discussion and debate.

A range of homileticsians have identified the real danger of alienating or at least distancing listeners by relying on the traditional monological style of preaching.¹⁰⁸

Henry J. Eggold, for example, argues in *Preaching is Dialogue* that:

One of the exciting and hopeful developments in preaching today is the accent on preaching as dialogue. It is an attempt to think of the sermon as a dialogue between preacher and listener instead of as the dreary monologue that it so often is.¹⁰⁹

It is important to note that Eggold is arguing for a reconceptualisation of preaching as dialogue, rather than a termination of it as a single-voiced communicative practice.

Eggold is by no means a lone voice in this understanding of preaching as dialogue.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Few homileticsians have gone so far as to suggest that good preaching is rooted in argument. Some have, however, asserted that it should be founded upon "polar thought". See, for example, Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1996, Chapter 12, "Polar Thought and Homiletical Relevance", pp.238-262.

¹⁰⁹ Henry J. Eggold, *Preaching is Dialogue - A Concise Introduction to Homiletics*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980, p.11.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, G.W. Jones, "Proclamation Is Dialogue - Not Monologue," in *Theology Today* 24, 1968, pp.509-511. See also: John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit - Where Leadership and Preaching Meet*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1995. He argues that: "The initial result of the backlash against authoritarianism in the pulpit was the short-lived dialogue movement in the 1960s. Some preachers began to experiment with two-party dialogue sermons, postsermon feedback sessions, involvement in sermon exegesis, removal of manuscripts and pulpits, and walk-around sermon delivery." p.40. Some of these practices are still being followed.

Other homiletics have moved on from the image of preaching as dialogue to that of preaching as conversation or interaction. David Schlafer suggests that “preaching is more of a community interaction than an individual monologue”.¹¹¹ He develops this point arguing that:

Preaching is more than speaking *to* a congregation, however sensitively, it is speaking *for* and *with* a congregation as well. Preaching attempts to articulate the concerns, questions, commitments, and celebrations of the whole faith community..... The sermon is not a monologue, but an unfolding conversation of the people of God - a conversation about and with God, and about their struggles to know and be faithful to God.¹¹²

At the heart of Schlafer’s argument for conversational preaching is the strongly stated belief that preachers should listen to a whole range of voices before speaking.¹¹³ One of the contentions of this thesis is that homiletics have listened to the voices of their congregation as well as to the voices of television and film, but they have often failed to listen to how single voices on the radio have attempted to initiate an imaginary dialogue or conversation with their listeners. This will be discussed later in the thesis.

At this stage it is valuable to see how certain homiletics have attempted to develop a more dialogical or conversational mode of preaching. Many have drawn upon Fred Craddock’s insightful works on preaching.¹¹⁴ Craddock identifies the problem of the monological approach which treats listeners like vessels for pouring information into. He argues that:

¹¹¹ David J. Schlafer, *Surviving the Sermon - A Guide to Preaching for Those Who Have to Listen*, Boston, Massachusetts: Cowley Publications, 1992, p.23.

¹¹² *ibid.*, p.24.

¹¹³ *ibid.*, pp.22ff. See especially: “Preaching is more listening than speaking.” p.22. “The speaking of a sermon comes from listening to all kinds of voices.” p.23. This is a common theme in other homiletical texts. See, for example, John Killinger, *Fundamentals of Preaching*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985, “The Importance of Listening”, pp.24-28.

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Gail R. O’Day and Thomas G. Long, editors, *Listening to the Word*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1993. See esp., Eugene L. Lowry, “The Revolution of Sermonic Shape”, pp.93-112. See also Fred Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, Enid, Okla.: Phillips University Press, 1971, pp.51-76.

..... sermons which begin with conclusions and general truths arrived at by the minister in the privacy of a study tend to oppress and treat as less than fully faithful and capable a listening congregation. Today, this is often called the banking method of communicating; that is, the speaker simply makes deposits of information in the mind of the listener.¹¹⁵

Craddock is not arguing here for a balanced, tame, or objective style of preaching which lacks passion or vision. He is rather explaining how he came to prefer an inductive approach over a deductive approach for preaching. He suggests **inductive** movement is from the “particulars to the general”, and **deductive** is from “the general to particulars”.¹¹⁶ The inductive approach attempts to turn the sermon from a closed monologue into a conversation between “the congregation and the biblical text”.¹¹⁷

In the parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14), for example, a deductive approach might be to begin with the general statement: “every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (v.14) The parable would be used as a tool to demonstrate and illustrate this truth. An inductive approach, might invite the listeners to reflect on the characters portrayed in this story. How do they act? What do they say? How is it relevant today? These could be questions raised to consider by a homiletician preparing to preach on this story. In short, Craddock’s approach to inductive preaching is an attempt to move the authority from the preacher to the text. The congregation is invited to explore it with the help of the speaker, rather than have the answers thrust upon them. In such a situation, the skilful use of pictorial language can aid those wanting to preach inductively.

Some homileticians have gone further than Craddock’s inductive model,¹¹⁸ and argued that preachers should use an “interactive”¹¹⁹ or a “collaborative”¹²⁰ form of

¹¹⁵ Fred Craddock, “Inductive Preaching” - unpublished paper for the Societas Homiletica - Stetson University, August 20-23, 1990. p.8.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.10.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.12.

¹¹⁸ See: Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995, p.214. Wilson makes an incisive critique on the use of inductive and deductive categories to describe the form of a sermon. He argues: “Inductive and deductive categories may work to describe styles of

preaching. Lucy Rose helpfully highlights some of the different characteristics of such participative approaches to preaching:

Conversational sermons are not “dialogue sermons” or “interactive sermons,” although these forms might lend themselves to conversational preaching. Instead conversational preaching in part grows out of and reflects the ongoing conversations between the preacher and members of the congregation in which the preacher is not the one-in-the-know but an equal colleague in matters of living and believing.¹²¹

In *Sharing the Word*, *Interactive Preaching* and *The Roundtable Pulpit*, it is clear that the authors are keen to move away from the preacher as “herald” or “sovereign”¹²² approach which often finds its theological support in a Barthian understanding of preaching.¹²³ They are also struggling with the dilemma which Craddock faced in 1971: “Since preaching is essentially monological, how best can principles and practices of truly participative dialogue be incorporated?”¹²⁴ This is the question that also lies behind Eggold’s, Schlafer’s and McClure’s discussions of preaching as dialogue, conversation and collaboration.

This section has demonstrated how there has been an attempt by certain homileticians to move away from seeing preaching as a monologue to a more interactive model,

preaching, but they do not work when each is attached to a particular form of sermon..... Preaching can be authoritarian in any form.”

¹¹⁹ D. Stephenson Bond, *Interactive Preaching*, St. Louis, Missouri: CBP, 1991.

¹²⁰ John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit - Where Leadership and Preaching Meet*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1995. See especially Chapter 2, “Towards a Collaborative Homiletic” and Chapter 3, “Collaborative Preaching”.

¹²¹ Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word - Preaching the Roundtable Church*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997, p.96. In this provocative recent book Rose challenges the assumption that there is a “gap between the preacher and the congregation” (p.90). She instead affirms preaching as a “joint task” of the preacher and the congregation (p.93).

¹²² *ibid.*, pp.30-31. See also Bernard Swain, *Liberating Leadership: Practical Styles for Pastoral Ministry*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986, p.40.

¹²³ Karl Barth, *Homiletics*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Donald E. Daniels, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991 (1963). See especially Barth’s definition of preaching on p.44. “Preaching is the Word of God which he himself speaks, claiming for the purpose the exposition of a Biblical text in free human words that are relevant to contemporaries by those who are called to do this in the church that is obedient to its commission.” See also, Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957.

¹²⁴ John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit - Where Leadership and Preaching Meet*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1995, p.47.

which involves the listeners participating more actively in the process of preaching. Underlying these attempts is the recognition that there has been a crisis in confidence in authority of the preacher, partially brought about by the multiplicity of voices communicated through the electronic media. Unlike Buttrick in the previous section on "From Static Points to Imaginative Moves", the homileticians focused upon here have rarely drawn explicitly from the world of either television or film to support their case.¹²⁵ It is clear, however, that in a society where a range of electronic audio-visual stimuli regularly bombard many people's imaginations, one step towards holding a congregation's attention with words is to recognise the importance of involving listeners in the sermon event. A "truly participative form of discourse" may also draw upon what has been described as an inductive, dialogical, conversational or collaborative approach to preaching. It will be argued later in the thesis that religious radio broadcasters may also have something to contribute to these discussions in homiletics, particularly in the field of conversational discourse.

iii. From Words to Plots and Images

It was suggested in the first part of this chapter that one of causes of the methodological crisis in preaching was this shift in the electronic media towards a more conversational form of discourse. Another cause, it was argued, is the apparent move away from verbal towards visual forms of communication. This has led to a vast multiplicity and plurality of electronic images bombarding audiences.¹²⁶ In the wake of this tidal wave of images, those who rely upon oral discourse to communicate look beleaguered. The sermon can appear to be an anachronism.

A range of homileticians have attempted to face this crisis in methodology brought about by our apparently image-saturated culture. Richard Eslinger, for example, argues that:

¹²⁵ Craddock argues that the power of television had "changed [the] shape of the human sensorium" from oral to visual. F. Craddock, *As One without Authority*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979, p.9.

¹²⁶ For a more detailed discussion of this phenomenon see the discussion of Jacques Ellul in Chapter 7 of this thesis.



By (the mixed) virtue of most any congregation's exposure to vast amounts of television programming, images of the culture and world are readily available. Since television advertising depends increasingly on an image-laden format, our culture's images of success, happiness, and popularity are constantly being stockpiled in the congregational consciousness.¹²⁷

Our new preaching situation, where TV images abound, led Paul Scott Wilson to argue that: "What Barth told preachers needs updating: Have the Bible in one hand, the newspaper in the other, and the TV on in the background."¹²⁸ Notice how Wilson has added the TV to this famous Barthian dictum. On the basis of the earlier citation, Eslinger would perhaps argue it should be in the foreground for today's preachers!

In this section it will be argued that the vision for preaching in culturally appropriate terms and forms has not been abandoned. Instead, the importance of structures and language appropriate to this media- influenced preaching situation have been developed by various homileticians. These two fields, sermon structure and preaching language, will be considered in this section.

First, structures: in a private interview David Buttrick argued:

People tend now to think through image systems. Your problem, however, is that a lot of young preachers are trying to preach solely in images; and again, without a logical structure in which these images can form, occur, and mean, they aren't going to do much for you. They are simply going to be images which don't necessarily provoke contemplation.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Richard L. Eslinger, *Narrative and Imagination - Preaching the Worlds that Shape Us*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, p.142.

¹²⁸ Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995, p.279. He continues: "The lives of our congregation's members are shaped by media. How they think is affected by media. What they talk about is in part provided by media." Barth's dictum provides an interesting qualification to his definition cited earlier in this chapter, see n. 123.

¹²⁹ David Buttrick, recorded private interview, Vanderbilt Divinity School, USA, 29 March 1994.

For Buttrick, images can provoke thought so long as they function structurally.¹³⁰ Image piled upon image, without obvious meaning, is one of the confusing characteristics of Postmodernity. A further danger is identified by Paul Scott Wilson: “preachers to whom images very readily come will often load their sermons with images.”¹³¹ The risk here is that “competing images shift the focus to a new scene or example every sentence or two.”¹³² The result is that “rather than the images serving the central idea of the sermon, the central idea is subverted into serving the images”. In short, the images “take over.”¹³³

The same may occur in radio programmes. For instance, the location of a “little picture” within the structure of the overall programme or report can add significantly to the texture of the broadcast. An image may, however, be so powerful that it can interrupt the flow of the programme. The same is true in the context of a sermon. While a picture adds depth and colour, it can so provoke or evoke the listener’s imagination that the preacher loses their attention, or the image is remembered and the message is forgotten. The unforgettable verbal image has the potential to undermine the structural integrity or plot of a sermon.

“Plot” is the significant word here. Eugene Lowry’s work on *The Homiletical Plot*,¹³⁴ is useful in this current discussion about sermonic structures. He argues that “plot” is “the key term for a reshaped image of the sermon. Preaching is storytelling.”¹³⁵ This theme, especially the importance of storytelling, also recurs in much recent homiletical literature.¹³⁶ Some scholars argue that this move towards narrative in homiletics is

¹³⁰ David Buttrick, *Homiletic*, London: SCM, 1987, see especially chapter 10 “The Image Grid”. Buttrick argues that: “what makes a good sermon is not one single illustration, but a gridwork of interacting images, examples and illustrations.” p.153.

¹³¹ Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995, p.254.

¹³² *ibid.*, p.254. For full citation and other relevant texts, see Conclusion of this thesis, n.30.

¹³³ *ibid.*, p.254.

¹³⁴ Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot - The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980. See also his *Doing Time in the Pulpit: The Relationship between Narrative and Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 15.

¹³⁶ See: Wayne Bradley Robinson, editor, *Journeys Toward Narrative Preaching*, New York: Pilgrim Press, 1990.

partially a result of television, which is mainly narrative in form and is “shaping the way listeners in the congregation actually” think.¹³⁷ Other homileticians suggest that Lowry’s work on plotting sermons also contributed to the rediscovery of the importance of narrative preaching.¹³⁸

Interestingly, Lowry builds upon the simple cycle of conflict and resolution found in much contemporary television drama.¹³⁹ His approach has been associated with what has been described as the “Copernican Revolution” within homiletics.¹⁴⁰ This is the move away from a spatial building block approach to sermon preparation, towards a sermon as an “*event-in-time*, a narrative art form”.¹⁴¹ In Lowry’s eyes there are a number of parallels between, on the one hand the preacher, and on the other hand the playwright, the novelist and the television writer. He does not, however, attempt to mimic the multiple plot development common to most TV Soap Operas. Instead he espouses a single plot line for sermons which is to be found in many other genres of television.¹⁴²

Lowry also draws upon specific films and television series to illustrate his argument. He uses the “typical movie plot” of the 1952 Western, *High Noon*,¹⁴³ to skilfully demonstrate how a plot can begin “with a felt discrepancy” and move towards “an unknown resolution.” He contrasts this with a “television series plot which begins

¹³⁷ Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995, p.208.

Narrative, however, has played a significant part in preaching well before the invention of television.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p.216. Wilson also highlights the pioneering work done in narrative by Henry Mitchell and Edmund Steimle. See for example: Edmund A. Steimle, Morris J. Niedenthal, and Charles L. Rice, *Preaching the Story*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980.

¹³⁹ For examples of conflict and resolution in television drama see: Robert C. Allen, ed., *To Be Continued - Soap Operas Around the World*, London: Routledge, 1995, and especially: Christine Geraghty, “Social Issues and Realist Soaps - A study of British soaps in the 1980/1990s,” pp.66-80.

¹⁴⁰ Richard L. Eslinger, *A New Hearing*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1987. p.65.

¹⁴¹ Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot - The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980. p.6.

¹⁴² This method finds implicit support from Paul Ricoeur’s fascinating discussion of “emplotment” in “Life in Quest of Narrative”, in David Wood, editor, *On Paul Ricoeur - Narrative and Interpretation*. London: Routledge, 1991, pp.20-33. Ricoeur argues that following a single story is a very complex operation, and the expectation is that “the audience readjusts as the story moves along”. pp.21-22.

¹⁴³ Fred Zinnemann, director, *High Noon*, United Artists, 1952. Gary Cooper and Grace Kelly played the lead characters of a US marshal and a pacifist Quaker.

with a felt discrepancy, but then moves towards a known conclusion.”¹⁴⁴ He argues that most sermons tend to follow this second “kind of plot”,¹⁴⁵ where it is clear the star will survive. In spite of this assertion he returns to *High Noon* later in the book in order to explain the “sudden reversal” stage in the sermon plot, which he describes as “disclosing the clue to resolution”.¹⁴⁶ The unexpected reversals in *High Noon* are used to illustrate the pivotal third stage in his “homiletical plot”,¹⁴⁷ where listeners are given a clue towards the denouement of the sermon.

The case being put forward is that Lowry’s ground-breaking work on plotting the sermon structure draws upon examples from the cinema and television to illustrate and support his case. Lowry is clearly open to learning from and even adapting the plotting devices employed by screen writers for his homiletical endeavour. Like Buttrick, however, his homiletical methodology is not controlled or determined by these media. Significantly for this thesis, neither Buttrick nor Lowry appear to consider the plots or structures of radio talks or drama.

This is also the case in the second field of enquiry in this section: language. It was highlighted in the Introduction of this thesis that a frequent refrain in Paul Scott Wilson’s text-book, *The Practice of Preaching*, is the “need for preachers to make a movie with words”,¹⁴⁸ or to become “movie directors.”¹⁴⁹ Some homileticians see the preacher’s role in more static terms. Bryan Chapell believes,¹⁵⁰ for example, that:

¹⁴⁴ Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot - The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980, pp.22-3. He cites *Barnaby Jones* or *Columbo* as examples of these television series plots. See also p.79 for further use of *Columbo* and the movie plot lines to illustrate his case.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.23. In other words, in the same way it is assumed that “the star will survive”, so “Jesus Christ will emerge as Saviour and Lord....But how? In what way? for what purpose?” For Troeger, it is this “unknown middle ground which provides the context for sermonic tension.”

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, pp.50-51.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.25. These five stages could be stated imperatively as: 1) Upset the equilibrium, 2) Analyse the discrepancy, 3) Disclose the clue to resolution, 4) Experience the gospel, 5) Anticipate the consequences. Underlying Lowry’s argument is the belief that listeners are more likely to engage with a story for themselves, if they also move through these five stages. See Section 2 iv of the Conclusion of this thesis for an example of this structure being put into practice

¹⁴⁸ Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995, p.255. See also p.183, and p.132.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.112. “We become like movie directors”.

¹⁵⁰ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centred Preaching - Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1994, p.174. From a section on “the Way of the Master”.

The preacher is much like a photographer, constantly framing one moment, one event, one sequence after another. By doing this, what looks common to the ordinary eye becomes significant.¹⁵¹

If the preacher is to become a “movie director” or “photographer” with words in the pulpit, then he/she must, according to Charles Rice, learn to experience imaginatively the world of the scriptural text.

.....if we have an experience of the text, allow ourselves to be led deeply into its images - in our mind's eye to see its people, places, and things - to experience its language as a new dawning, there is every likelihood that the resulting sermon will in form and content, rely upon and awaken the imagination.¹⁵²

One of the great strengths of using pictorial language and other “*vivid details*”¹⁵³ is its ability to create images on the screens of the listener's imagination. The writer and preacher, Fred Buechener, speaks evocatively of “preaching the King who looks like a tramp, the prince of peace who looks like a prince of fools, the lamb of God who looks like something hung up at the butchers.”¹⁵⁴ Such “vivid language”¹⁵⁵ in preaching has the potential to act like a “magnet”, drawing “a cluster of reflections and emotions”.¹⁵⁶ This imagery is drawn from a scholar already cited, who has been described as one of the fathers of modern English-speaking homiletics, Fred

“Relating truth through illustrative narratives, parables, allegories, and images was Jesus' method of communicating. His was not an age of visual literacy par excellence (at least in terms of modern media) yet illustrative materials pervaded his expressions. If in Christ's times illustrations were necessary, how much more, given the contemporary influences, must today's preacher weigh the need for illustrative content.” Notice how Chapell bases his argument both on imitating Christ's practice and taking the communicative context seriously.

¹⁵¹ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centred Preaching - Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1994, p.180.

¹⁵² Charles Rice, “Shaping Sermons by the interplay of Text and Metaphor”, in *Preaching Biblically*, ed. Don M. Wardlaw, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983. p.104. Also cited by Richard Eslinger in *A New Hearing*, p.22.

¹⁵³ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centred Preaching - Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1994, p.184.

¹⁵⁴ Fred Buechner, *Telling the Truth, The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy and Fairy Tale*, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1977. p.60.

¹⁵⁵ Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text - Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988, p.186. Greidanus emphasises the importance of “using concrete, vivid language”.

¹⁵⁶ Fred Craddock, *Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985, p.197.

Craddock. A recurring theme in his work is also the importance of the well selected verbal image.¹⁵⁷

One recent significant European text which has briefly considered the place of pictorial language within preaching is Gerd Theissen's *The Sign Language of Faith*.¹⁵⁸ Theissen is uncompromising in his argument for specific "homiletical imagery":

.....images and symbols are not ornaments in a sermon. They are part of its substance. The poverty of imagery is an offence against the task of preaching.¹⁵⁹

He supports these forceful assertions on a number of levels. First, "pictorial language is discourse with open referents. Images are not only designations for something that is known but challenges to seek something unknown in the known. They are semantic disruptions which direct our attention to something new."¹⁶⁰ Part of the power of these "disruptions" lies in their ability to extend the meaning of the picture, and so lead the listener towards a new vision. Secondly, "pictorial language is further characterised by a fusion of being and meaning."¹⁶¹ In Theissen's understanding, pictorial language simultaneously refers to the picture described and also leads the listener to the meanings beyond the portrayal. Herein lies the fusion of "being and meaning". It is almost as if he is arguing that pictorial language can help provoke and answer not only "Who am I?" but also "Why am I?" questions. Such questions can be heightened by: "description of sights, sounds, and sensations that the listeners would take in were they in such a context", this approach can "vicariously involve them in that experience."¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ Fred Craddock, *As One without Authority*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979, p.78.

¹⁵⁸ Gerd Theissen, *The Sign Language of Faith*, translated by John Bowden, London: SCM, 1995.

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p.74.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.73.

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.73.

¹⁶² *ibid.*, p.185.

Certain homiletics are keen to go beyond preachers simply engaging the visual imagination. Webb Garrison argues forcefully:

Words that name colors, shapes, sounds, odors and other tangibles help create backgrounds that evoke moods. Anything that moves you can move your listeners - provided they are brought into firsthand encounter with stimuli that produced the emotion.¹⁶³

This point is extended by those homiletics who also underline the importance of using vivid multi-sensorial language, “words which you can see, smell, touch, taste, hear and feel.”¹⁶⁴ Or as Davis describes them “sensuous words” which are “words that are close to the five senses, suggesting pictures the mind can see, sounds it can hear, things it can touch, taste and smell.”¹⁶⁵ This is supported by Patricia Wilson-Katner who understands “imagery” in preaching as meaning “more than pictures”; for her “it includes the whole physical and sensory dimension of the world portrayed in a sermon.”¹⁶⁶ One of the strengths of such multi-sensorial language is that it can work on many different levels, feeding different parts of the listeners’ imaginations. It is potentially multi-dimensional.¹⁶⁷ If David Buttrick is correct when he asserts “pulpit language must relate to a new twentieth century consciousness that is simultaneous, perspectival and complex”,¹⁶⁸ then the use of such multi-sensorial or sensuous language partially answers that need.

Behind many of these calls for the development of pictorial or multi-sensorial language is a serious attempt to aid effective oral communication and so engage the listeners’ imaginations. This part of the discussion began with a call for preachers to act like movie directors, it ended with an encouragement to develop a discursive style which engages all the senses. Once again cinematic or photographic models were

¹⁶³ Webb B. Garrison, *Creative Imagination in Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1960, p.185.

¹⁶⁴ Edward F. Markquart, *Quest for Better Preaching*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984.

¹⁶⁵ Henry Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958. See also Chapter 7 of this thesis, especially sections 4.iii and 5.vi.

¹⁶⁶ Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Imagery for Preaching*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989. p.20.

¹⁶⁷ Wilson-Kastner highlights the “rich ability of images to sustain many meanings”. She describes this as “multidimensionality”, *ibid.*, p.54.

¹⁶⁸ David Buttrick, *Homiletic - Moves and Structures*, London: SCM, 1987, p.56.

drawn upon by homileticians to support their arguments, but the world of radio broadcasting was left untroubled.

Conclusion

This chapter commenced with a discussion of three crises confronting preaching today. A crisis in listening, a crisis in confidence and a crisis in methodology were each identified as raising significant challenges to those concerned with communicating in our new preaching situation. It was argued that electronic audio-visual stimuli which bombard us have the potential to influence how we listen, how we speak and how we view the task of preaching itself. A range of homileticians' discussions of this situation were used to support the case for a revised approach to oral communication in this rapidly changing communicative setting.

The three crises analysed in the first part of this chapter were balanced by the discussion of how homileticians had responded to these challenges in the second part of this chapter. First, it was argued that the transition from a single-camera approach to preaching to a multi-camera approach was a useful tool for engaging easily distracted audiences. Secondly, it was suggested that the move away from an authoritarian monological style of preaching to a more conversational discursive style, may encourage a "truly participative form of discourse." Thirdly, it was implied that the development of structures and language appropriate to this situation increased the likelihood of engaging listeners.

On the basis of these three transitions, there are signs that preaching is facing up to some of the issues raised by the threefold crisis outlined in section one, and even enjoying a resurgence in confidence. It is as if the "papas", and "mamas", of homiletics are now beginning to ignore Madonna's refrain: "Don't Preach." As a face to face medium, relying primarily on verbal communication, preaching stands out as a rare species in an electronic media-saturated society of mass communication. When compared to other forms of communication habitually used today preaching stands

out, almost alone, as a set piece of public discourse. This strangeness may be a strength in a context where electronically mediated communication appears to dominate. Nevertheless, even if preaching is "*sui generis*"¹⁶⁹ preachers cannot afford to ignore our audio-visual context, nor should they acquiesce entirely to its more seductive images. Preaching has reached a transitional moment where both the theory and practice of homiletics need to continue to adapt to an environment where many listeners are becoming more used to interactive and audio-visually based communication. Preachers who wish to be effective communicators today cannot yearn for and mimic styles from the "golden age of pulpit princes", nor can they continue without making any concessions to the more dialogical forms of public discourse listeners are increasingly accustomed to hearing.

It has been demonstrated that the process of adaptation and learning is taking place in certain areas of homiletics. Film and television, for example, are regularly cited and drawn upon by homileticians seeking to answer the dilemma of making oral communication effective today. It has been argued, however, that one medium which has many close connections with preaching has largely been ignored. The crisis and transformations which radio has undergone will, therefore, be discussed in the following chapter.

¹⁶⁹ Ian Pitt-Watson, *A Primer for Preachers*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986, p.13. Pitt-Watson argues that preaching is "*sui generis* - in a class by itself". This is a common refrain amongst homileticians.

Chapter 2. **Radio in Crisis and Transformation?**

Even though radio is integral to the pattern of our lives, we rarely give it a second thought..... to overlook radio is to miss the big picture.¹

It was argued in the previous chapter that the theory and practice of radio broadcasting have largely been ignored by homileticians. The central contention of this thesis is that radio broadcasting does have lessons to teach those seeking to communicate orally and effectively in a context where a whole range of other audio-visual stimuli are competing for the listener's attention. In short, it is being asserted that certain aspects of radio should not be overlooked by homileticians today.

The discussion of this second chapter will, therefore, focus on radio broadcasting. As has been suggested earlier there are a number of interesting parallels to be drawn between preaching and radio broadcasting.² Both have suffered from pessimistic diagnoses and prognoses, which could be summed up as: radio and preaching are in crisis; they have a bleak future, and are in terminal decline. Both forms of communication have also basked in more optimistic assessments, which might be characterised as: radio and preaching are in transition. They have a hopeful future, especially if they continue to adapt to their new communicative environments.³ It will be argued in this chapter that radio broadcasting has survived and even developed through a series of crises. The suggestion, by implication, is that lessons for the survival and development of preaching may also be drawn from this analysis of radio.

First of all, this chapter will briefly analyse one crisis which radio broadcasting faced in the middle of this century. Unlike preaching, most of the crises in radio are generally considered to be things of the past. Nevertheless, the bleak predictions for radio's future will be considered. Secondly, some of the transitions that radio has undergone

¹ Mary Ann Watson, "Seems Radio is Here to Stay", in Edward C. Pease and Everetter E. Dennis, editors, *Radio - The Forgotten Medium*, London: Transaction Publishers, 1995 [1993], p.204. (Hereafter referred to as : *Radio - The Forgotten Medium*, 1995.)

² See sections 1 and 2 of the Introduction of this thesis.

³ Henk Hoekstra and Marjeet Verbeek, "Possibilities of Audiovisual Narrative" in Philip J. Rossi and Paul A. Soukup, editors, *Mass Media and the Moral Imagination*, Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1994, p.213. They also describe the "new communicative environment" as the "audiovisual culture".

over the last fifty years will be discussed, in particular the implications of the transformations which have taken place in radio technology, in listening habits, and in radio speech. It will be shown that some of the transformations that radio has undergone have lessons for preachers today.

Thirdly, certain aspects of radio theory and practice will be evaluated. In particular, Rudolf Arnheim's theoretical and seminal work on radio will be discussed in the light of broadcasting practice. It will be suggested that some of his arguments do not stand up to critical evaluation, and that the theoretical insights he presents should be treated with caution by homileticians seeking to learn from his radio theory. It will be asserted instead that the practice of two leading broadcasters operating contemporaneously with Arnheim provide a useful qualification to his case. Their practice also provides good material for homileticians seeking to learn from radio broadcasters, in particular concerning the use of pictorial language as a tool for connecting with the audience.

The flow of the argument in this chapter builds towards this third and final section. The two sections on "Radio in Crisis?" and "Radio in Transformation?" should be read not only as an attempt to balance the discussions of the first chapter on "Preaching in Crisis?" and "Preaching in Transition?", but also as providing a context for a critical discussion of Arnheim's thesis. The underlying assumption of this chapter is that before attempting to learn from the practice of specific radio broadcasters it is important to engage in a critical analysis of the crises that radio has been through, the transformations it has undergone and the theoretical discourse that has evolved around it. Each of these three strands may provide useful insights for homileticians. The question, "how, in a society where visual images appear to dominate, do you hold an audience's attention with words?" is pertinent for both preachers and radio broadcasters. It is also a central concern of this chapter.

1. Radio in Crisis?

“Radio was great, now it’s out of date.”⁴

The advent and popularisation of television led some to argue that radio was an “outdated” form of communication, which was in terminal crisis. This section will first investigate the nature of the crisis which radio broadcasting faced. As in the previous chapter on homiletics, a music video will be used to initiate the discussion. It will then be suggested that this pessimistic prognosis for radio was premature: radio has survived and retains a significant role in today’s broadcasting ecology. The affirmation of the survival of radio will provide the second focal point for discussion. As stated above the movement of radio through crisis to survival may also have lessons for those homileticsians who are attempting to steer preaching through the crises it currently faces. On the basis of radio’s recrudescence it will be argued that a critical discourse needs to be further developed for engaging insightfully with the theory and practice of radio.

i. The Death of Radio

“Video Killed the Radio Star”⁵

This was the title to the first music video played on MTV, screened on August 1st, 1981. “In a montage of exploding TV sets destroying vintage radios, The Buggles sang: ‘Pictures came and broke your heart.....video killed the radio star’.”⁶ This was not a new refrain. Over thirty years ago similar taunts were levelled at radio.⁷ It had no future. The “TV and Video Age” meant we would soon be waving goodbye to

⁴ A line from a popular song from the 1960s.

⁵ I am indebted to Island Records, New York, USA, for sending me a copy of the music video: *Video Killed the Radio Star* by The Buggles. (Duration: 3 minutes 25 seconds)

⁶ Quentin J. Schultze et al., *Dancing in the Dark*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991, p.179. It is argued “that this was the channel that would challenge and conquer radio’s long-time dominance of the teen audience not only throughout North America but also through much of the world.” p.178. See, also, R. Serge Denisoff, *Inside MTV*, New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1988, p.54.

⁷ Gillian Reynolds, “Radio Future”, in Andrea Hargrave, editor, *Radio and Audience Attitudes*, London: John Libbey, 1994, pp.57-61. “Thirty years after commentators pronounced it dead, radio is alive and growing.” p.57.

Radio Days.⁸ They had become like a distant hazy summer vaguely remembered from childhood. Eric Rhoads, the publisher of the industry magazine *Radio Ink*, believes that:

Ever since the passing of radio's golden era, when it was the only mass entertainment medium, radio has been considered by cynics to be in decline..... Over the past 50 years, nothing has been able to overcome the perception that television's birth meant radio's death.⁹

As early as 1936 some commentators, whilst holding that radio was a "sensational" new "form of expression", still believed that it was "highly probable" that television would destroy "the new wireless form of expression even more radically than the sound film ever destroyed the silent film."¹⁰ It was almost as if, what the historian Asa Briggs described as "the great citadel of sound",¹¹ the BBC's Broadcasting House, had been stormed and overrun by television.

With some 56% of the United Kingdom's population, more than 20 million people, watching the Coronation Service in 1953 on television,¹² it is not surprising that the 1950s is often seen as the beginning of the crisis for radio. Even as early as 1950 the then chairman of the Radio Industry Council, J.W. Ridgeway, declared: "It is inevitable that television will become the primary service and sound the secondary one."¹³ This analysis finds support in Colin Seymour-Ure's useful text, entitled *The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945*; in which he argues that: "TV stole its time from radio. Radio's peak hour audience (6.00pm-11.00pm) dived from 35 per cent of the population in early 1947 to about 4 per cent in the early 1960s."¹⁴ In the

⁸ Woody Allen directed *Radio Days*, Orion Pictures, 1987.

⁹ B. Eric Rhoads, "Looking Back at Radio's Future", in *Radio - The Forgotten Medium*, 1995, p.15. It is debatable, however, whether radio has ever been the "only mass entertainment medium", as films for the mass audiences pre-date radio.

¹⁰ Rudolph Arnheim, *Radio*, Translated by Margaret Ludwig and Herbert Read, London: Faber and Faber, 1936, p.16. (Hereafter referred to as Rudolph Arnheim, *Radio*, 1936).

¹¹ Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume V - Competition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p.30.

¹² Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume IV - Sound and Vision*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, see "Television's Coronation", pp.420-435.

¹³ *ibid.*, Vol. IV. p.387.

¹⁴ Colin Seymour-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991, p.147.

words of Kenneth Wolfe: "With the arrival of a visual competitor in television the beguiling power of radio was over and vast tracts of the population moved rapidly out of earshot."¹⁵ The statistics for radio licences in the UK in the late 1950s are also illuminating. In March 1957, *joint* radio and television licences were fewer than radio *only* licences, whereas this was no longer true by 1958.¹⁶

This moment, when joint licences became more common than single licences, is a statistical turning point. Consider also the BBC expenditure statistics for radio and television at this time. In 1955-6 nearly 11 million pounds were spent on radio, compared to only 7 million on television. Whereas in 1958-9 just over 11 million pounds were spent on radio, contrasted with nearly 14 million pounds on television.¹⁷ In short, television expenditure had nearly **doubled** in just over a year, whilst radio had increased by little more than half a million pounds. The signs for radio were ominous. The rapid evolution of video recording technology,¹⁸ and the subsequent increased flexibility in broadcasting pictures looked set to "break radio's heart". According to Jay Black and Jennings Bryant: "The radio industry was scared," the reason for this was that: "Throughout most of the 1950s, the prevailing attitude in the industry was that radio was dying."¹⁹

.....faced with competition from first one and then two television networks, radio went into a long decline that some thought would prove terminal. Between 1949 and 1958 the BBC's average evening radio audiences dropped from nearly 9 million to less than 3.5 million.....²⁰

¹⁵ Kenneth M. Wolfe, *The Churches and the British Broadcasting Corporation - 1922-1956 - The Politics of Broadcast Religion*, London: SCM, 1984, p.537.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, Vol. V. p.30.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, Vol. V. p.30.

¹⁸ Albert Abramson, "The Invention of Television" in Anthony Smith, editor, *Television - An International History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp.32-34. Abramson provides a helpful outline of the evolution of video recording machines. "The first videotaped network broadcast was made by CBS TV with *Doug Edwards and the News* from Television City in Hollywood on 30 November 1956." p.33.

¹⁹ See: Jay Black and Jennings Bryant, *Media - Introduction to Communication - Fourth Edition*, Dubuque, IA: Brown and Benchmark, 1995, p.266. This citation refers explicitly to the American industry, but could also be applied to the British radio industry at this time.

²⁰ Andrew Crisell, *Understanding Radio*, Second Edition, London: Routledge, 1994, p.27. Crisell cites B. Paulu, *British Broadcasting in Transition*, Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota

Interestingly, three quarters of those 3.5 million in 1958 were without television sets. Over these nine years, many listeners in the United Kingdom had become dissatisfied with what BBC radio offered, but not necessarily with what radio itself could offer. They were attracted to other stations such as Radio Luxembourg. Television was clearly one alternative for listeners, but not the only other distraction.

ii. *The Renaissance of Radio*

Thirty years after commentators pronounced it dead, radio is alive and growing.²¹

With the benefit of hindsight it is possible to see clearly that television, and subsequently video recorders, did not “destroy” the “new wireless form of communication”. Radio has, to many commentators’ surprise, survived on both sides of the Atlantic. Marilyn Matelski argues, in an article entitled “Resilient Radio”, that :

Over and over again..... reports of radio’s death have proven premature..... Far from shrivelling from the media scene, there is no medium more ubiquitous than radio, no source of information, entertainment, music, sports, weather and business news more pervasive in people’s lives.²²

This bold claim for the ubiquity of radio finds some statistical support. Talk radio, for example, is currently enjoying a renaissance in certain areas of the world.²³ An optimistic article by Mary Ann Watson called “Seems Radio is Here to Stay” highlights that: “There are radios through all American homes - more than five on

Press, 1961, p.155. Crisell believes that “though television was clearly the major cause” of this huge decline in audience, “there were problems with radio’s tripartite programme network.” p.27.

²¹ Gillian Reynolds, “Radio Future”, in Andrea Hargrave, editor, *Radio and Audience Attitudes*, London: John Libbey, 1994, pp.57-61, see especially p.57.

²² Marilyn J. Matelski, “Resilient Radio”, in *Radio - The Forgotten Medium*, p.5.

²³ This can be most clearly seen in the United States with the growth over the last ten years of “Talk Radio” stations and shows. See: Annie Brewer, *Talk Shows and Hosts on Radio*, Dearborn, Michigan: Whitefoord, 1993. The second edition identified 1052 talk shows and their hosts in the United States, Puerto Rico and Guam, compared to 651 in the first edition. p.vii. This increase is part of a wider growth of radio stations in the United States. In 1994 the total number of radio stations in the USA was 11,608 compared to 5,537 in 1965. See: Jay Black and Jennings Bryant, *Media - Introduction to Communication - Fourth Edition*, Dubuque, IA: Brown and Benchmark, 1995. p.269.

average - not just in the living room, but the kitchen, bedroom, basement, bathrooms, plus the Walkman and the one in the car.”²⁴ For Richard Ducey, radio is the “oldest electronic survivor” which is “part of the American culture and continually reveals an unsinkable ability, if not to prosper, at least to maintain and grow.”²⁵ This position is supported by Edward Pease and Everetter Dennis who argue that “a close look at radio demonstrates its vitality, its economic, political and social importance, as well as its staying power in the communication field.”²⁶

These comments may have been written from within an American context, but they have parallels in the United Kingdom, where in the 1980s there were more radio sets than people.²⁷ Radio Critic Gillian Reynolds argues:

Radio is part of the daily life of almost everyone who lives in the UK. People wake up to it, or switch it on first thing. We carry our radios around the house or have different sets in each room, ready to switch on. Even people with in-car CD systems listen to more radio than records. There are 40,804,000 listeners each week who take in 847,735,000 hours of output.²⁸

Such isolated statistics should be read with some caution. Ken Garner persuasively argues in his article, “Reading RAJAR: Making Sense of Radio Ratings”,²⁹ that “year-on-year comparisons are to be favoured.”³⁰ If, for example, one compares the figures for the total “weekly reach” for the UK in the third quarter in 1995 with the same period in 1993, a drop of nearly 500,000 listeners is apparent.³¹ Even limited comparisons such as these should not be used as “fool-proof” indicators of general

²⁴ Mary Ann Watson, “Seems Radio is Here to Stay”, in *Radio - The Forgotten Medium*, p.204.

²⁵ Richard V. Ducey, “Riding Radio’s Technological Wave”, in *Radio - The Forgotten Medium*, p.164.

²⁶ Edward C. Pease and Everetter E. Dennis, editors, *Radio - The Forgotten Medium*, London: Transaction Publishers, 1995 [1993], p.xv.

²⁷ Colin Seymore-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991, p.147.

²⁸ Gillian Reynolds, “Radio Future”, in Andrea Hargrave, editor, *Radio and Audience Attitudes*, London: John Libbey, 1994, p.57, and see *RAJAR*, Quarter, 2 / 1994.

²⁹ Ken Garner, “Reading RAJAR: Making Sense of Radio Ratings,” in *Media Education Journal*, Winter 1995, Issue 19 “Festivals and Audiences Issue”, pp.6-9.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.6.

³¹ *ibid.*, p.8. See “Table 1: Radio Listening Now (‘95) and Then (‘93)”. Weekly reach for 3rd quarter in 1995 was 40,514,000 compared to 41,001,000 for the 3rd quarter in 1993.

listening trends in the United Kingdom. They should act as a counter to any complacency about radio's future.

It is important, however, to recognise, first, that these general fluctuations do not indicate a haemorrhaging of listeners and, secondly, that in both the United Kingdom and the United States of America there is a confidence amongst scholars and commentators in radio's proven ability to survive and even to thrive within our rapidly evolving communicative context. Bertholt Brecht's poem on radio addressed to "You little box", contains the plea: "Promise me not to go silent all of a sudden." On the basis of the statistics and sources cited in this section, it will certainly not go "silent all of a sudden": radio is a survivor. This melancholy poem by Brecht contains some clues as to why radio has survived the apparent crisis in listening provoked by the advent of electronic images. The "little box" is pictured "near my bed". It is what Brecht hears "last thing at night and first thing in the morning".³²

Brecht's insights in poetic form echo the perceptions of radio critic Jacki Apple: "Radio is seductive. It strokes the senses, wraps itself around you, whispers in the dark, wakes you up in the morning."³³ One of radio's great strengths is that while this "soundscape"³⁴ does not demand one hundred per cent attention, it may still encroach upon the listener's consciousness, with sound pictures of what Brecht enigmatically described as "their victories and of my cares".³⁵ Few earlier scholars have analysed in depth these strengths of radio and its ability to survive the "listening crisis". We turn now to consider the implications of this academic neglect.

³² Cited in R.B. Heath, *Radio and Television*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1969, p.62. The poem conveys effectively how radio has the potential power to waken and to send to sleep, to surround the listener with a "sound-environment". See: La Monte Young, "Ruminations on Radio", in *Radiotext(e)*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1993, p.183. Young reflects on the nature of our "sound environment".

³³ Jacki Apple, "The Art of Radio", in Neil Strauss, editor, *Radiotext(e)*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1993, p.307. (Hereafter referred to as: *Radiotext(e)*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1993). Apple continues: "It is not always what you say it is the way you say it. Radio art is about the voice as instrument, the voice as place, the voice as emotion, the voice as spirit, the voice as body, the body of the voice, the place of a voice, the feel of a voice."

³⁴ R. Murray Schafer, "Radical Radio" in *Radiotext(e)*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1993. Schafer writes of our "rich and contemporary soundscape", arguing for more rigorous study of this context. p.295.

³⁵ R.B. Heath, *Radio and Television*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1969, p.62.

iii. *The Academic Neglect of Radio*

In comparison to television, film and homiletics, radio has received little rigorous academic study. Peter Lewis and Jerry Booth agree: "radio is hardly noticed in academic literature."³⁶ Compared to the films of early directors such as D.W. Griffith,³⁷ or the documentaries produced by the "father of the documentary" John Grierson,³⁸ specific radio programmes or producers are rarely discussed.³⁹ This view finds support elsewhere. According to Pete Wilby and Andy Conroy, "radio has tended to be the 'Cinderella' of academic research and study."⁴⁰ This marginalisation of radio studies is true of both the core activities and the more esoteric aspects of radio. The result is, first, that "radio practice and policy lacks a language for critical reflection and analysis",⁴¹ and, secondly, as "an art form radio is in the toddler stage, radio art's parameters are still undefined and its practitioners have yet to establish a critical discourse."⁴² Other commentators see this "poverty of criticism" as rooted in radio's "lack of an exegetical apparatus for external analysis."⁴³ In other words, scholars need to develop certain hermeneutical tools by which radio broadcasting might be analysed.

³⁶ Peter M. Lewis and Jerry Booth, *The Invisible Medium, Public, Commercial and Community Radio*, London: MacMillan, 1989, p.xiii. Hereafter normally referred to as: *The Invisible Medium*, 1989.

³⁷ Scott Simmon, *The Films of D.W.Griffith*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, is a good introduction to the work of the "first widely acknowledged master film-maker".

³⁸ For examples of texts providing useful work on documentary, and work of Grierson see: Paul Wells, "The Documentary Form: Personal and Social Realities", in Jill Nelses, editor, *An Introduction to Film Studies*, London: Routledge, 1996, pp.167-191; Elizabeth Sussex, *The Rise and Fall of British Documentary*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976; and Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, revised edition, 1983.

³⁹ A radio dramatisation of H.G. Wells's *War of the Worlds*, by Orson Welles and "The Mercury Theatre on the Air", on 30th October 1938, is a rare example of a radio programme which has received considerable academic attention. See, for example, Shearon A. Lowery and Melvin L. DeFleur, *Milestones in Mass Communication Research - Media Effects*, Third Edition, Whiteplains, New York: Longman, 1995, chapter 3, "The Invasion from Mars: Radio Panics America", pp.45-67.

⁴⁰ Pete Wilby and Andy Conroy, *The Radio Handbook*, London: Routledge, 1994, p.15. Prior to this statement they argue that: "The glamorous and visual media of film, television and - albeit to a less analytical extent - the press have received considerable academic attention as cultural forms in syllabuses ranging from liberal and general studies, through English literature to the specific disciplines of communication, media and cultural studies." p.15.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.xiii.

⁴² Jacki Apple, "The Art of Radio", in *Radiotext(e)*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1993, p.308.

⁴³ R. Murray Schafer, "Radical Radio" in *Radiotext(e)*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1993, p.295.

A subsidiary aim of this thesis is to highlight the need for a more developed “critical discourse” for radio, and especially an explanation of how radio broadcasters use words to engage their listeners’ imaginations. This is a vital art for radio broadcasters to preserve and continue to develop. The understanding of this element of radio work, the engagement of the listener’s imagination, has a vital part to play in the academic rediscovery of *The Invisible Medium* of radio, and to borrow another recent book title, it may also help to foster a renaissance of *The Forgotten Medium* of radio.⁴⁴

These two books, *The Invisible Medium* (1989) and *The Forgotten Medium* (1995), represent a rare species: recently published texts which focus solely on radio broadcasting. The adjectives “invisible” and “forgotten” might also be applied to the skill of holding an audience’s attention with words on radio. This is a skill which is often used, but rarely explicitly analysed. These books’ existence is also evidence which supports the belief that radio’s “cultural significance is only beginning to receive wider recognition in academic circles”.⁴⁵

In the USA a further reason for the lack of critical work on discourse within radio broadcasting is that, even beyond academic circles, there often appears to be silence surrounding it:

Radio is very rarely the topic of “public discussion”, giving it the dubious identity as the “forgotten medium”..... This the oldest of the broadcast media and once the king of the electronic media, has been pushed farther and farther into the background of the media family photo.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Full references: Peter M. Lewis and Jerry Booth, *The Invisible Medium, Public, Commercial and Community Radio*, London: MacMillan, 1989, and Edward C. Pease and Everetter E. Dennis, editors, *Radio - The Forgotten Medium*, London: Transaction Publishers, 1995 [1993].

⁴⁵ Pete Wilby and Andy Conroy, *The Radio Handbook*, London: Routledge, 1994, p.15.

⁴⁶ *Radio - The Forgotten Medium*, 1995, p.xv. In the same text Mary Anne Watson argues in her article, “Seems Radio is Here to Stay”, that: “The pervasiveness of television..... has largely eclipsed the scholarly and popular attention radio deserves.” p.204. Radio was also once briefly “king” of the British media family, but, as in the USA, it appears to have been forced to abdicate its throne.

Radio in the United Kingdom, by contrast, is often the topic of “public discussion”.⁴⁷ BBC Radio 4 in particular provokes a strong brand of loyalty.⁴⁸ According to radio producer, Suzanne Levy, listeners are “passionate about it, with an almost proprietary zeal.”⁴⁹ Nevertheless, as in the USA, it also lacks the development of a “critical discourse”, and even a “public discussion”, comparable to that of film or television. This may partially be due to its anticipated demise in the 1950s and 1960s.

Radio’s peripheralisation within the electronic media “family” could be seen as a sign that like preaching, it is an anachronistic form of communication, which may have little place in a culture which many see as becoming more and more dominated by the visual. Alternatively, and this is the position taken by the author, two important points could be put forward. First, radio has a strong survival instinct. It will be argued in the following section that one of the keys to radio’s survival has been its ability to adapt itself to a rapidly changing communicative environment. Secondly, as a focus of academic study, it is also emerging with a new sense of confidence. Scholars are now beginning to take more seriously the study of radio: “A good radio programme”, Murray Schafer believes, “deserves the same critical attention as a good book or a good film.”⁵⁰ One reason for such calls to take radio seriously academically may be the increased fragmentation and diversification within radio itself:

The “renaissance” of interest in broadcast sound can be attributed in some small degree, to the emergence of alternative forms of radio broadcasting, which themselves owe their genesis to major shifts and consolidations in the international and local structuralization of technology, economics, power, and cultural production.⁵¹

⁴⁷ See, for example, the “Save *Woman’s Hour* Campaign” in the early 1990s, and the extensive public discussions in 1997 about the proposed changes to Radio 4, initiated by the controller James Boyle.

⁴⁸ “Most organisations would kill for the kind of loyalty BBC listeners display.” Maggie Brown, “Warning: your wireless is exploding”, in *The Independent*, 19th January, 1995. Brown singles out the proposed march to Broadcasting House by BBC Radio 4 listeners as an example of loyalty. (See Section 2. iv, note 118 of this chapter for more details.)

⁴⁹ Suzanne Levy, “Devoted to “Auntie Beeb””, in *Radio - The Forgotten Medium*, p.136. Consider also the passion of many of the contributions to Radio 4’s regular *Feedback* programme.

⁵⁰ R. Murray Schafer, “Radical Radio” in *Radiotext(e)*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1993, p.295. Schafer argues that: “What we need is the study of broadcasting in terms of semiotics, semantics, rhetoric, rhythmic and form.”

⁵¹ Jody Berland, “Contradicting Media: Toward a Political Phenomenology of Listening”, in *Radiotext(e)*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1993, p.209.

The existence of Jody Berland's analysis of the "renaissance" of interest in broadcast sound, is itself a pointer towards the growth of this subject, beyond the one sphere which has already received a fair amount of scholarly attention: radio history.⁵²

In this section, it has been argued that radio has weathered a number of crises: the popularisation of television, in particular, was perceived as a challenge to radio's survival. It has been asserted that the pessimistic predictions of the 1950s and early 1960s have not been fulfilled and radio has survived. This interpretation of radio as a survivor has fascinating connections with the first chapter's discussion of preaching in crisis and transition. Given that some critics have proclaimed the complete demise of preaching, the ability of radio to survive and succeed in adapting to a new broadcasting environment may also have something to teach homiletics. These adaptations will be considered in greater detail in the following section.

Before progressing to this discussion, it is important to highlight another relevant parallel between preaching and radio. It has been argued that, until recently, the academic study of radio has been marginalised in the field of communications. Homiletics has also been viewed as a "secondary discipline",⁵³ which has been eclipsed by other theological disciplines.⁵⁴ This, however, is changing. For example, Bernard Reymond argues that "homiletics is not a peripheral discipline, but

⁵² "Radio history figures most strongly in academia." Peter Lewis and Jerry Booth, *The Invisible Medium*, 1989, p.2. See, for example, Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, 5 volume set, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, or Eric Barnouw, *A History of Broadcasting in the United States*, 3 volumes, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966, 1968 and 1970. See also: Horst J.P. Bergmeier and Rainer E. Lotz, *Hitler's Airwaves: The Inside Story of Nazi Broadcasting and Propaganda Swing*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

⁵³ Bernard Reymond, "Homiletics and Theology: Re-evaluating their Relationship", *Modern Churchman*, New Series, Vol.XXXIV, No.5, 1993, pp.30-43, see page 38. Reymond argues that dogmaticians and ethics professors consider homiletics as a "secondary discipline, which comes after other theological disciplines have finished their work." p.30.

⁵⁴ See: David Buttrick, "Teaching Preaching in a New Century", in Martha J. Simmons, editor, *Preaching on the Brink - The Future of Homiletics*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1996, pp.75-83. Buttrick speaks of "the eclipse of homiletics" (p.75) and later suggests that: "all of a sudden, homiletics seems to have recovered" (p.77).

a *central*, even *focal*, discipline of theology".⁵⁵ Whilst other theologians would not go so far, perhaps they would acknowledge, simply on the basis of academic and popular homiletic texts produced in the last twenty years, the veracity of David Buttrick's belief that there has been a "recovery of homiletics".⁵⁶ It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to investigate whether this recovery has led to a radical and comprehensive transformation in preaching or to more gradual shifts in both the understanding and the practice of preaching. The significant point to emphasise in this discussion is how certain homileticians and scholars of radio have attempted not only to adapt to a transformed communicative environment, but also to reassert the importance of their respective disciplines.

On the basis of what has been argued above, it appears reasonable to suggest that radio is a survivor and that preaching also has the potential to survive the crises it faces. Nevertheless, for both forms of communication survival is by no means guaranteed. Underlying this analysis is the belief that adaptation is vital for survival. Given the focus of this thesis is: "what can preachers learn from radio broadcasters?", it is important to consider carefully the transformations which radio has undergone.

⁵⁵ Bernard Reymond, "Homiletics and Theology: Re-evaluating their Relationship", *Modern Churchman*, New Series, Vol. XXXIV, No. 5, 1993, p. 38. It is important to recognise that Reymond is addressing the 1990s situation. In the 1950s preaching and the sermon were at the heart of the work of many theologians. For example, Rudolf Bultmann, was himself a regular preacher, who was keen to proclaim a demythologised *Kerygma* which would be accessible for modern listeners. Bultmann's concern for preaching can be illustrated by two citations: "Revelation..... renews itself from moment to moment in the preaching delivered by definite historical figures." *Glaube und Verstehen*, vol. ii, pp. 258-9 (English trans., *Essays*, p. 287), and, "The preacher in his sermons must not leave his hearer in any uncertainty as what he requires them to believe to be true....." Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma und Mythos*, vol. i (1948), p. 15 (English trans., p. 9). Preaching for Bultmann was a central concern. This was also true of the preacher-theologian, Karl Barth. "More than any thinker in the century, Barth linked theology and preaching: He proposed that theology should be 'nothing other than sermon preparation.'" David Buttrick, intro., p. 8. in Karl Barth, *Homiletics*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. Barth argues in the same text: "Preaching is the Word of God which he himself speaks". p. 44. Significantly, the actual act of communication received little attention from either Bultmann or Barth.

⁵⁶ David Buttrick, "Teaching Preaching in a New Century", in Martha J. Simmons, editor, *Preaching on the Brink - The Future of Homiletics*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1996, p. 75.

2. *Radio in Transformation?*

The earlier section attempted to demonstrate that the forecasting of radio's death was premature. Radio has survived a number of crises, such as the competition provoked by television and subsequent loss of listeners. It has, however, not just survived; it has also experienced a number of transformations. This section will consider in detail a number of these transformations, each of which has implications for those homileticians who are concerned with learning from the world of radio.

i. From Communal to Individualistic Listening

A profound transformation was taking place within the family, for with the transistor the radio became not only mobile but also individual. Whereas in the 1940s the family had gathered together around the radio, in the 1960s each family member pursued his or her own activities whilst listening to a separate radio.⁵⁷

Patrice Flichy, a French communications scholar, correctly highlights a number of important shifts in listening habits. Most significantly for the current discussion, radio is now *rarely* listened to in groups. In the days of crystal radio some families used to cluster round a large porcelain bowl, with the headphones placed in the centre. The intended result was amplified sound. Listening to the radio was a family or communal event, the radio broadcast normally being the central focus of attention for the duration of the program. The advent of transistors made radio into a "truly ubiquitous medium".⁵⁸ This, and other developments, have ensured that radio is now a far more flexible and portable medium, and because of this it has become a secondary or background activity for individual members of the family.

⁵⁷ Patrice Flichy, *Dynamics of Modern Communication - The Shaping and Impact of Communication Technologies*, London: Sage, 1995, pp.159-160.

⁵⁸ Frank Gillard, *Sound Radio in the Television Age*, BBC Lunch-time Lectures, second series, no.6, p.8. See also Andrew Crisell, *Understanding Radio*, 2nd edition, London: Routledge, 1994, p.29.

For some, however, radio still has the power to move from being a background noise, to a primary focus of attention.⁵⁹ Marshall McLuhan's musings on radio as a "tribal drum" in the early 1960s may now sound a little dated, but it is fascinating, and a little surprising, to see how he uses the common practice of having the radio on in the background as evidence of its capability to touch listeners deeply:

The power of radio to involve people in depth is manifested in its use during homework by youngsters and by many other people who carry transistor sets in order to provide a private world for themselves amidst crowds.⁶⁰

The *potential* of radio to "involve people in depth", combined with the technological advances which have transformed listening to radio into a primarily "privatised" activity, may also explain radio's ability to survive.

The "resilience of radio in the television age can be explained partly by developments in transmission and reception technology."⁶¹ Raymond Kuhn's discussion of the survival and development of "Radio" in his work on *The Media in France*, could be also applied to the UK and the USA:

The increasing use of the FM waveband has greatly improved sound quality, while the spread of transistor radios, hi-fi tuners, walkman radios, radio alarm clocks and car radios is a notable feature of contemporary lifestyles and leisure patterns..... Not only have these developments helped radio achieve virtual saturation point in terms of market penetration..... they have changed the nature of listening habits, providing the possibility of continuous audience exposure to radio programmes and making the medium more portable and individualistic than television.⁶²

⁵⁹ Consider for example a BBC Radio 4 radio play, Lee Hall's *Spoonface Steinberg*, produced by Kate Rowland, broadcast 27th January, 1997. "The BBC got an unprecedented 200 calls enthusing and requesting a repeat." One truck driver said: "This was the most poignant piece of radio I have heard for years. I am a truck driver and I was in tears." Another driver admitted that it "touched him so deeply he had to stay in his car until it ended." See Anne Karpf, "Spoonface stirs it up", *The Guardian*, Wednesday, February 19th, 1997, G2, p.13: "Most remarkably, *Spoonface Steinberg* is a monologue, delivered entirely by 10-year old Becky Simpson, who plays a seven-year-old terminally autistic child."

⁶⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media-The Extensions of Man*, London: Ark, 1987 (1964), p.298.

⁶¹ Raymond Kuhn, *The Media in France*, London: Routledge, 1995, p.79.

⁶² *ibid.*, pp.88-89.

The increased flexibility and portability of radio have clearly contributed to the “continuing commitment to radio listening”, found in many European countries.⁶³

If we focus on one particular recent adaptation: the Walkman radio, then an intriguing picture of a “communication bubble” emerges.⁶⁴ This term points to an isolated and potentially mobile experience of radio. Jonathan Sacks’ powerful metaphor of the “Walkman of the mind”,⁶⁵ whilst used in a different context, also resonates with this experience of a highly individualised hearing of radio. This is illustrated by Patrice Flichy who believes that the Walkman “allows teenagers to remove themselves from adult supervision whilst still living with their parents.”⁶⁶ What Frank Gillard of the BBC suggested was true of the transistor, is perhaps even more accurate for the radio Walkman: “Radio goes with you. So it becomes a personal service.”⁶⁷

It is important to re-emphasise what was stated at the start of this section: Radio has shifted from being an experience often relished in community, epitomised by the picture of a family clustering around the wireless, to a far more individualistic experience enjoyed by listeners who can be more mobile and active whilst listening. For those seeking to capture the attention of their listeners with words on the radio,

⁶³ *ibid.*, p.80. Average amount of time spent per day listening to the radio by adults in 1989-90 (in minutes): Switzerland - 174, Netherlands - 169, United Kingdom - 159, West Germany - 154, and France - 131.

⁶⁴ Patrice Flichy, *Dynamics of Modern Communication - The Shaping and Impact of Communication Technologies*, London: Sage, 1995, p.165. This isolating tendency can be interpreted in different ways. Mark Noll, for example, argued in *Christianity Today* that the Walkman poses a serious challenge to Christianity because it represented “one more competitor to the voice of God”. 1987, pp.22-3. Such “distracting”, “atomizing” and “alienating” views about the Walkman are challenged in, Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, Linda Janes, Hugh Mackay and Keith Negus, *Doing Cultural Studies - The Story of the Sony Walkman*, London: Sage, 1997. They point to how Sony’s own market research into the Walkman which divides usage into “two particular types: “escape” and “enhancement”.” p.92. On these grounds they suggest that: “There is no grand ‘universal’ turning away from the world into privatised, atomistic distraction..... while one’s listening may be private, the codes that inform listening are inherently social.” p.94.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Sacks, *The Persistence of Faith - Religion, Morality and Society in a Secular Age*, The Reith Lectures 1990, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1991, “We no longer talk of virtues but of values, and values are tapes we play on the walkman of the mind: any tune we choose so long as it does not disturb others.” p.41.

⁶⁶ Patrice Flichy, *Dynamics of Modern Communication - The Shaping and Impact of Communication Technologies*, London: Sage, 1995, p.165.

⁶⁷ Frank Gillard, *Sound Radio in the Television Age*, BBC Lunch-time Lectures, second series, no.6, I am indebted to Andrew Crisell, *Understanding Radio*, 2nd edition, London: Routledge, 1994, p.29.

this is a significant transition, as broadcasters can assume even less than before that listeners are hanging on their every word or are “sitting comfortably” eagerly listening to all their broadcasts.

Preachers too face a similarly difficult task as they seek to hold the attention of their listeners with words. It might also be argued that whilst preaching remains a communal event, the drift towards an individualistic spirituality may mean that individuals in the congregations listen in isolation. This finds extreme expression in the growing popularity of sermon tapes produced by some of the larger churches.⁶⁸ The sermon in this case can be heard in the privacy of one’s own car or kitchen. For the “house-bound”, who can no longer attend services, this can help them feel part of the congregational community. Nevertheless, as with listening to the radio-Walkman, the taped sermon is a highly individualised way of listening. The majority of listeners can be more mobile and active, but they may consequently be more easily distracted.

ii. From Single to Many Radio Voices

Another significant transformation in radio has been the fragmentation and increased choice for listeners.⁶⁹ Some commentators see this as one of radio’s strengths.

Radio’s mix of networks and independents give it a unique ability to reach both large audiences and yet still cater to diverse cultural and political interests. On the one hand network broadcasts like *The Larry King Show* can be heard by millions of listeners over more than a 1,000 affiliates. On the other hand, low-power stations allow for extremely localised community programming.⁷⁰

Carpini’s description of the current radio landscape in the USA correctly highlights American radio diversity. It also counters the pessimistic prognoses in the mid-part of

⁶⁸ See, for example, All Souls Langham Place, London, which has a vast and popular tape library of past sermons.

⁶⁹ Maggie Brown argued in the mid 1990’s that: “After decades of cosy stagnation, Great British radio is lurching towards a multi-station future of cut-throat commercialism with audiences and talent spread thin.” Maggie Brown, “Warning: your wireless is exploding”, in *The Independent*, 19th January, 1995.

⁷⁰ Michael X. Delli Carpini, “Radio’s Political Past”, in *Radio - The Forgotten Medium*, 1995, p.30.

this century. As has been argued earlier that, for the moment, radio looks set to survive. This is a medium “not just of historical import, but also of contemporary significance”.⁷¹ It has also been suggested that radio, like other media, has continued to evolve technologically. Eric Rhoads, for example, identifies a number of new developments in radio. These include: digital compression, regional satellite radio, direct broadcast satellite (DBS), digital audio broadcasting (DAB), and radio broadcasting data service (RBDS).⁷² Such new technological innovations in radio highlight that the “future for radio is promising”⁷³ and that:

The challenge for radio broadcasters will be to harness the technologies of the digital world in order to provide a variety of programmes.⁷⁴

The significant point for the discussion here is made by Andrew Crisell, in his discussion of the Radio Data System (RDS).⁷⁵ He believes that this system will allow the listener to choose a specific output, and so: “a likely consequence of this technology is that it will *weaken* station loyalty by allowing the listener to shop around even more than push-button tuning would.”⁷⁶

Add to this observation three other points: First, in the last ten years there has been a considerable increase in the number of radio stations in both the USA and the UK;⁷⁷

⁷¹ Raymond Kuhn, *The Media in France*, London: Routledge, 1995, p.83. Kuhn is speaking here of radio in France. I would argue that this assertion is relevant to radio in global terms.

⁷² B. Eric Rhoads, “Looking Back to Radio’s Future”, in *Radio - The Forgotten Medium*, 1995, pp.17-19.

⁷³ *ibid.*, 19.

⁷⁴ Andrew C. Barrett, “Public Policy and Radio - A Regulator’s View”, in *Radio - The Forgotten Medium*, 1995, p.157.

⁷⁵ RDS here is understood to mean the same technology as RBDS, as used by Eric Rhoads. RDS, Radio Data System, as explained by Crisell “exploits the large bandwidth of FM broadcasts to transmit data as an inaudible signal along with the output”. In more practical terms it is an “automatic tuning system” which both provides the best signal of the listener’s chosen station and also the facility to “push a button for news, current affairs, rock, classical music, drama or whatever”. See: Andrew Crisell, *Understanding Radio*, Second Edition, London: Routledge, 1994, p.41. (Hereafter this will be referred to as: Andrew Crisell, *Understanding Radio*, 1994.)

⁷⁶ Andrew Crisell, *Understanding Radio*, 1994, p.41.

⁷⁷ See footnote 23 for statistics on the growth of radio in the USA and for UK statistics and discussions see *Understanding Radio*, 1994, pp.37-39, and Andrea Millwood Hargrave, editor, *Radio Audiences and Attitudes*, Broadcasting Standards Annual Review, 1994, London: John Libbey, 1994, especially pp.33-40.

secondly, “between 1985 and 1990 total radio output in Britain increased by 65 per cent, yet average weekly listening during the same period increased by 17 per cent”,⁷⁸ and thirdly, with the digitalisation and ensuing convergence of broadcast technologies, audience choice in radio and beyond listening to radio will continue to grow rapidly.⁷⁹ This highly competitive and rapidly developing media environment, combined with greater choice and ease of radio channel switching,⁸⁰ has, literally and metaphorically, made it harder to hold an audience. The development of a critical discourse, therefore, which assists radio broadcasters to understand more fully how words can capture an audience’s attention is an important field of study, even outside the walls of the academy. This endeavour will be embarked upon in the section on “Radio Theory and Practice” later in this chapter.

The development of such an understanding is also relevant to preachers who are no longer the single educated voice in the public square or village. Instead, the preacher’s voice is one among many competing for an audience and its attention. The preacher is often an amateur communicator operating in a world of professional communicators, most of whom have learnt the importance of moving away from a proclamatory style of communication to a more conversational form of discourse.

iii. From Proclamation to Conversation

A third significant transformation in radio has been related to the style of discourse employed by broadcasters. This could be described as the shift away from proclamation to conversation. In his fascinating recent text on *Media Discourse*,

⁷⁸ Andrew Crisell, *Understanding Radio*, 1994, p.39.

⁷⁹ See: Tony Feldman, *Introduction to Digital Media*, London: Routledge, 1997. Feldman describes aspects of the “digital revolution”, which is “being forged by an accelerating move from a world familiar with analogue media to a world that will be increasingly dominated by digital media.” p.1. Most relevant for the present discussion is his description of a software package called RealAudio, which gives access to “24-hour Internet Radio, which is based on the hourly output of news from ABC.” p.148. See also Nick Higham, Presenter on *The Technophobe’s Guide To The Future*, BBC 2, 7 May, 1996, on the future of digital television.

⁸⁰ Jim Moir, controller of BBC Radio 2, admitted that: “We expect 400 new stations by the year 2000”, but he believes there will be about the same number of listeners. *Feedback*, BBC Radio 4, 12 May, 1996. Channel switching is facilitated for by systems such as RDS.

Norman Fairclough suggests that not only journalists, but also: “politicians or senior managers or archbishops or various categories of expert address the public in a conversationalised communicative style.”⁸¹ This conversational approach to broadcast discourse may, according to Fairclough, suggest a: “shared membership of the same lifeworld, and in so doing implicitly negate the differences of position, perspective and interest.”⁸² This resonates with Scannell’s view that:

.....people did not expect to be talked down to, lectured or “got at”. They expected to be spoken to in [or with] a familiar, friendly and informal manner as if they were equals on the same footing as the speaker.⁸³

Paddy Scannell’s understanding of how listeners expect to be communicated with is now also applicable to listeners of preaching.⁸⁴ Perhaps the evolving style of *Broadcast Talk* and *Media Discourse* has partially ensured that listeners will not accept being “talked down to, lectured or “got at” ” by preachers, and instead expect a more “contemporary” style of language.⁸⁵

On radio in the 1930s, whilst it was possible to “notice a dozen times a day that speakers do not talk in a conversational tone into the microphone” but bellow “through the microphone to an audience of millions,”⁸⁶ many, however, were delighted by those broadcasters who made you feel “like the guest of an old friend who is looking through some dusty old correspondence by the fireside.”⁸⁷ These broadcasters had learnt the importance of using a conversational style of discourse on the radio. Such discoveries “accelerated the trend away from impassioned oratory and toward public conversation between speaker and audience.”⁸⁸ Scannell notes:

⁸¹ Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, London: Edward Arnold, 1995, p.148.

⁸² *ibid.*, p.148.

⁸³ Paddy Scannell, editor, *Broadcast Talk*, London: Sage, 1991, p.3. Manner has replaced “matter” in the original extract. I am assuming that this was a typographical error.

⁸⁴ Calvin Miller, *Marketplace Preaching*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1995. “Rhetoric was once the stuff of great sermons. Now the entire tone of worship should be conversation.” p.73.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p.33.

⁸⁶ Rudolph Arnheim, *Radio*, 1936, p.72.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p.77.

⁸⁸ Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Eloquence in An Electronic Age - The Transforming of Political Speechmaking*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p.53.

Quite quickly, older public models of speaking (the lecture, the sermon, the political speech) were replaced by more direct, intimate, personal styles of speech. In short, broadcasting learnt that its expressive idiom must, in form and content, approximate to the norms of ordinary, everyday, mundane conversation, or talk. In talk-as-conversation participants treat each other as particular persons, not as a collective.⁸⁹

Broadcasters had begun to learn that: “while they control the discourse”, they did “not control the communicative context”.⁹⁰ The implications from this were that broadcasters needed to “understand the conditions of reception” and so adapt appropriately to the fact that they were often being heard within the “sphere of domesticity”.⁹¹ Hence, Roosevelt’s “fireside chats” signalled a “new model of communication: one person in the private space of his living room chatting with millions of other individuals in theirs.”⁹² As broadcasters understood the medium better, and recognised the listening context of the audience, they increasingly relied upon what Fairclough described as a “conversationalised communicative style.”

This “new model of communication” was considered by Marshall McLuhan in his provocative essay on radio:

Radio affects most people intimately, person-to-person, offering a world of unspoken communication between writer-speaker and the listener. That is the immediate aspect of radio. A private experience. The subliminal depths of radio are charged with the resonating echoes of tribal horns and antique drums. This is inherent in the very nature of this medium, with its power to turn the psyche and society into a single echo chamber.⁹³

⁸⁹ Paddy Scannell, *Radio, Television and Modern Life*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, p.12. The fourth chapter of this thesis will include a more detailed analysis of the work of two religious broadcasters from the 1940s who employed “more direct, intimate” and conversational forms of radio broadcasting.

⁹⁰ Paddy Scannell, editor, *Broadcast Talk*, London: Sage, 1991, p.3. See also: Paddy Scannell, *Radio, Television and Modern Life*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996. Scannell asserts that: “A growing sensitivity to the implications of the domestic spaces of reception created a conscious readjustment of the forms of talk that radio produced, with a clear aim of being more suitable for ‘fireside’ listening.” p.19.

⁹¹ Paddy Scannell, editor, *Broadcast Talk*, London: Sage, 1991, p.3.

⁹² Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Eloquence in An Electronic Age - The Transforming of Political Speechmaking*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p.55.

⁹³ Marshall McLuhan, “Radio - The Tribal Drum”, *Understanding Media - The Extensions of Man*, London: Ark, 1987 (1964), p.299.

This rich quote raises many issues, some of which are beyond the scope of this discussion, some of which echo the points made earlier about the increasingly individualised nature of listening to radio. Whilst McLuhan highlights the intimate, person-to-person and private nature of radio, his metaphors of “tribal horns and antique drums” also point back to communication instruments of a former age, an oral culture. They evoke images of another kind of “fire-side chat”, this time story-telling and informal conversations around the tribal camp fire. McLuhan sees a parallel between such traditional forms of communication and radio. Both have the power to unify speakers and listeners, or to use Fairclough’s terminology, to instil a sense of a “shared life-world”.⁹⁴ One important strand within McLuhan’s discussion of radio appears, therefore, to be a recognition of the strengths of the electronic “fire-side chat”,⁹⁵ or conversational model of communication.

Behind this understanding of radio’s compatibility with a more intimate form of public discourse, lies a belief that such a form of communication resonates subliminally with a pre-Gutenberg oral age. The art of “conversational communication” heard on the radio is not therefore a “new model” in itself. For McLuhan, radio’s electric orality has contributed towards the return to a more “oral culture”.⁹⁶ What is relatively novel, however, are forms of communication, such as radio, which allow speakers, without moving themselves, to cross barriers of space and to communicate simultaneously with thousands of separate private domestic spheres.⁹⁷

George Orwell reflected on this and on other aspects of radio broadcasting in a fascinating essay entitled “Poetry and the Microphone”:

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p.148.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.299. McLuhan argues that F.D.R. had “learned how to use the hot radio medium for his very cool job of fireside chatting.” See the conclusion of this chapter for a critique of McLuhan’s understanding of radio.

⁹⁶ This important theme in McLuhan’s thought was developed more extensively by Walter Ong. Ong’s work on the renewal of or return to orality will be discussed in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

⁹⁷ Paddy Scannell argues that: “It is not just that radio and television *compress* time and space. They create new possibilities of being: of being in two places at once, or at two times at once.” Paddy Scannell, *Radio, Television and Modern Life*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, p.91.

In broadcasting your audience is conjectural, but it is an audience of *one*. Millions may be listening, but each is listening alone, or as a member of a small group, and each has (or ought to have) the feeling that you are speaking to him individually.⁹⁸

Orwell, a former talks writer with the BBC External Services, also highlights the importance of understanding the radio listeners' context. The imperative is to ensure that each person feels as if they are being spoken to as an individual. Clearly one way to facilitate this process is to employ a conversational communicative style. The extent to which religious radio broadcasters adopt this style will be tested out in specific case-studies later in the thesis.

This discussion of the shift "from proclamatory to conversational" modes of discourse on the radio has an important parallel with a suggestion made in the first chapter. It was argued there that many homileticians have also identified and affirmed a move away from declamatory forms of presentation to approaches which can generate intimacy or trust through a more conversational style of speaking. This argument is strengthened by the fact that most listeners to sermons have been saturated in and are accustomed to the conversational discourse of the mass media. A return to a proclamatory style of preaching is inviting a communication break-down. A style of preaching which follows the example of radio, employing a conversational form of discourse, may have a greater chance of connecting with the congregation and so instilling a sense of a "shared life-world" between listener and speaker.

At this stage in the discussion, before further parallels or lessons are identified, it is important to highlight some of the differences between radio and preaching. Orwell provides some pertinent insights, relevant to this issue, into the distinction between radio and public speaking:

it is reasonable to assume that your [radio] audience is sympathetic, or at least interested, for anyone who is bored can promptly switch

⁹⁸ George Orwell, "Poetry and the Microphone", in *George Orwell, The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters: Volume 2*, edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, London: Penguin, 1970 (1958), pp.374-382. Also in *Radiotext(e)*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1993, p.167.

you off by turning a knob. But though presumably sympathetic, *they have no power over you*. It is just here that a broadcast differs from a speech or a lecture. On the platform, as anyone used to public speaking knows, it is almost impossible not to take your tone from the audience. It is always obvious within a few minutes what they will respond to and what they will not.....⁹⁹

Orwell highlights how the public speaker has the advantage over the radio broadcasters of receiving immediate non-verbal feedback, and can therefore interact with her/his listeners' physiognomies or body language.

Preachers also fall into this category as they can usually see most, if not all, of their listeners from their pulpit or preaching position. Nevertheless, Orwell's comments lead into a consideration of the differences between radio and preaching. These include: first, the obvious point, that the radio broadcaster is not normally there in person for the listeners, but is mediated through the medium of radio itself. Or to invert the equation, the audience is rarely present when the broadcaster speaks. The opposite is usually the case when the preacher is speaking. Preaching is traditionally a face-to-face form of communication. Secondly, with the exception of taped sermons discussed above, listening to preaching is normally a less private activity than listening to radio. Contrast a half-full church of 100 listening to a sermon with a couple in the car listening to the radio. Thirdly, the radio is often listened to as a secondary activity, compared to the sermon which is usually listened to by a seated congregation, who would generally not be involved in other activities whilst listening!

It is important to highlight such differences because the general direction of the discussion up to this point has been to emphasise the parallels between radio and preaching. This is a qualification to these observations. Because they are different forms of communication, it is an attempt to underline that lessons should not be drawn uncritically from the radio broadcasting for preaching. For example, the conversational style may work well on radio, but using such forms of discourse

⁹⁹ *Radiotext(e)*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1993, p.167.

without taking into account the listeners' changed hearing situation may lead to "intimate" words being lost in a large church amongst many other worshippers.

Three central contentions have been made so far in this section on "Radio in Transformation?" First, listening to radio has become a more privatised activity; secondly, there are now a multiplicity of radio stations to choose from; and thirdly, radio broadcasters have moved away from a proclamatory to a more conversational form of discourse.¹⁰⁰ It is vital to underline that I am not arguing at this stage that preaching should transform itself into a more privatised, more diverse and more conversational form of communication in order to guarantee its survival. It is being suggested, however, that within these transformations there may be lessons for homileticians. For example, it has been argued that the move in radio towards a more conversational form of discourse reflects a heightened sensitivity to the hearer's situation. This is an important lesson for those preachers who speak without imagining themselves into their listeners' world.

This point leads to the fourth and final transformation. Some radio theorists and practitioners have outlined a case for a more interactive style of radio, thereby going a step further than simply developing a conversational style of discourse. This argument parallels the discussion of interactive or dialogical preaching earlier in this thesis.¹⁰¹

iv. From Distribution to Communication

Unlike the first three transformations identified above, it could be argued that the movement from "distribution to communication" in radio is still in its infancy. It was the playwright Bertholt Brecht who argued:

Radio is one-sided when it should be two. It is purely an apparatus for distribution, for mere sharing out. So here is a positive suggestion: Change this apparatus over from distribution to communication. The radio would be the finest possible

¹⁰⁰ The implicit suggestion is that these transformations may have contributed to the survival of radio.

¹⁰¹ See Chapter 1 section 3. ii of this thesis.

communication apparatus in public life.... That is to say, it would be if it knew how to receive as well as transmit, how to let the listener speak as well as hear, how to bring him into a relationship instead of isolating him.¹⁰²

Bertholt Brecht's radical suggestion for radio might also be applied to preaching. As this form of communication can also often be "one-sided" when "it should be two". Some homileticians have drawn upon Paulo Freire's terminology¹⁰³ and described the "one-sided" model of communication as the "banking concept of homiletics",¹⁰⁴ where the "preacher preaches and the listeners are preached at." A radically revised approach, therefore, to broadcasting and preaching might be to "let the listener speak as well as hear".¹⁰⁵ This is happening to a limited extent, in radio, through emails or phone call-ins,¹⁰⁶ and in preaching, through discussion groups.¹⁰⁷ As broadcaster Brian Hayes correctly points out: "Today, there is nothing unusual about hearing the voice of the public on the radio."¹⁰⁸

Brecht's idea of a more two way style of communication is an admirable vision, but perhaps the very nature of radio and preaching limits the development of a truly interactive or two-way form of connection. Beyond the formal and restricted channels of the post-box, fax machine, and telephone, many broadcasters are simply not used to

¹⁰² Bertolt Brecht, "The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication", in Neil Strauss, editor, *Radiotext(e)*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1993, p.15. Also in *Brecht on Theatre*, edited and translated by John Willet. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964. Originally published as "Der Rundfunk als Kommunikationsapparat" in *Blattaer der Hessischen Landestheater*, Darmstadt, No.16, July 1932.

¹⁰³ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1971, p.67. Freire argues against "banking" education, which is merely concerned with "transferrals of information", and argues for a more dialogical approach which blurs the teacher-student divide.

¹⁰⁴ D. Stephenson Bond, *Interactive Preaching*, St. Louis, Missouri: CPB Press, 1991, pp.58-60.

¹⁰⁵ Listeners already do this within the Black Preaching context. See: Henry Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990, "The Use of Call and Response and Repetition", pp.92-93. Mitchell affirms this describes, affirms and interprets this practice.

¹⁰⁶ Scannell perceptively points out: "Audience members who elect to take part in phone-ins enter the discursive space of the programme but not its physical place. They remain in their own place while dialling into a public discourse." Paddy Scannell, *Radio, Television and Modern Life*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, p.141.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, the "collaborative" methodology espoused in: John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit - Where Leadership and Preaching Meet*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995, especially Chapter 4: "Collaborative Brainstorming: A Word to Preachers." pp.59-72.

¹⁰⁸ Brian Hayes, "The Role of the Public Voice in Present-day Radio", in Andrea Hargrave, editor, *Radio and Audience Attitudes*, London: John Libbey, 1994, p.41.

dealing with an ongoing, conversational form of critical feedback. Similarly preachers, whilst they inevitably have more face to face contact with their listeners, can easily remain safely ensconced within a “distribution” model of communication, which also protects them from the risk of real engagement with their listeners. In other words, some traditional communicators operating in these two fields, may pay lip-service to a two-way communication model,¹⁰⁹ but in practice they often act as if they are operating within a simple one-way sender to receiver paradigm.¹¹⁰ The reality may be more complex, but perceptions have a habit of shaping practice.

The current rapid convergence of communication technologies, which is already making interactive communication more common-place,¹¹¹ will lead to audiences becoming more used to being active receivers of information. They will perhaps therefore be increasingly dissatisfied if they are relegated to the role of passive receivers.¹¹² Given this changing communicative context, Bertholt Brecht’s radical advocacy for a more interactive form of communication appears to be even more relevant today for oral communicators seeking to hold their listeners’ attention.

Before considering further how this move from “mere distribution” to “engaging communication” can take place, it is important to highlight another distinction between preaching and broadcasting. There is normally a significant difference between the broadcaster’s and the preacher’s context. The broadcaster *usually* works within the privacy of a small,¹¹³ sound-proofed studio, often accompanied by a

¹⁰⁹ For a clear outline of such an approach see: Denis McQuail and Sven Windahl, *Communication Models - For the Study of Mass Communication*, Second Edition, London: Longman, 1993, p.19.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.17.

¹¹¹ Tony Feldman, *Introduction to Digital Media*, London: Routledge, 1997. “For many the shift to digital means a move from passive to interactive media. But it is already clear..... that interactivity is only a thread in the fabric of change and development.” p.18.

¹¹² “In about the first decade of the new century we will have a transition from the information society to the experience society. It will be about “being there”Instead of buying a television set, a camcorder, a computer and a telephone, you will buy one terminal that will integrate all of those capabilities together.” Professor Peter Cochrane cited by Mark Harrison, *Visions of Heaven and Hell*, London: Channel 4 Television, 1995, p.7.

¹¹³ This description of the studio as a “private space” is a qualification to Scannell’s belief that “the radio or television studio is a public place into which people come to take part in a variety of political, cultural, educative or entertaining programmes.” Paddy Scannell, *Radio, Television and Modern Life*, Oxford: Blackwells, 1996, p.140.

handful of colleagues or invited guests in the cubicle and in the studio itself.¹¹⁴ She/he speaks over the airwaves normally to a mass audience, the vast majority of whom are not known to the broadcaster. Scannell has neatly summarised this doubled context: "A broadcast programme has two spaces: that from which it speaks and that within which it is heard."¹¹⁵ Preachers, by contrast, regularly communicate in a single large public space, but frequently to a comparatively small group of listeners. They often know, especially if it is their "own" church, a large number of those listening.

In many radio stations the small enclosed world of the broadcast suite is protected from the outside world by padded doors and, depending on the size of the station, a reception desk and even security guards. Peter Dahlgren, the Swedish communication specialist, argues persuasively that: "those media institutions which are of most significance for the majority of citizens are..... to a great extent beyond the reach of citizen practices and interventions."¹¹⁶ Occasionally the private sphere of the studio, and the media institution, venture "the other side of the window" through outside broadcasts (OBs), through inviting "citizens" to watch and participate, and more frequently by reporters or producers making forays into the world beyond the walls of the broadcasting centre.

This may seem a little caricatured as a description of a radio station, but it does not go as far as the Russian radio critic, Velimir Khlebnikov, who pictures an iron castle-like structure with a skull and cross bones marked DANGER:

For the slightest halt in the working of Radio would produce a spiritual swoon of the entire country, a temporary loss of its consciousness.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Cubicle refers to room linked to studio where the producer and studio managers normally sit during broadcasts.

¹¹⁵ Paddy Scannell, *Radio, Television and Modern Life*, Oxford: Blackwells, 1996, p.139.

¹¹⁶ Peter Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere, Citizenship, Democracy and the Media*, London: Sage, 1995, p.155.

¹¹⁷ Velimir Khlebnikov, "The Radio of the Future", in *Radiotext(e)*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1993, p.32.

This may appear a little over-dramatic. Nevertheless, whilst the UK did not fall into a “spiritual swoon”, changes on Radio 4 have had a habit of provoking listeners to extreme acts. Broadcasting House was recently the target of a proposed march of dissatisfied listeners.¹¹⁸ The building itself may not resemble an iron castle. It was, however, initially viewed as an “old iron-clad battleship” which was “sailing *up* Regent Street”.¹¹⁹ It remains a somewhat closed environment, surrounded by a sea of people in central London. One of the first performers to “climb aboard” admitted: “My lasting impression of Broadcasting House was that it was a world of its own”.¹²⁰ In spite of many extensions, alterations, limited open days and programmes about the work inside, it endures as a “world of its own”, which demands a certain amount of “insider” knowledge to make sense of this “citadel of sound”.¹²¹ It is ironic, therefore, that such a relatively closed sphere seeks to “distribute” entertainment, information and education to so many outside in the public sphere. It is also worth remembering that most broadcasts are often heard in the private sphere of the home or private car.¹²² The way broadcasters attempt to build a bridge between the private sphere of the studio and some of the private spheres of the listeners’ “communication bubble” may contain some important lessons for preachers who are attempting to build bridges with their listeners.

Unfortunately, some preachers are closed to such lessons and still operate with a “distribution” model of preaching. They simply distribute the words to their

¹¹⁸ “To have provoked the middle classes into threatening to march on Broadcasting House to protect a much-loved service from its own top managers sounds like an implausible achievement, but that is exactly what happened when the BBC threatened to remove Radio 4 from long wave.” Maggie Brown, “Warning: your wireless is exploding”, in *The Independent*, 19th January, 1995.

¹¹⁹ Colin Reid, *Action Stations - A History of Broadcasting House*, London: Robson Books, 1987, p.20. Reid attributes this to W.K.Newson, one of the engineers who helped install the equipment in the original control room.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, p.46, attributed to pianist Jean Melville who had joined the BBC in 1927.

¹²¹ For insider knowledge, see Philip Schlesinger’s fascinating study on the workings of Broadcasting House’s (BH) news room in the late 1970s. Philip Schlesinger, *Putting Reality Together*, Second Edition, London: Routledge, 1987 (1978). This text covers not only BBC radio news at BH, but also BBC television news at White City, and was based on ninety full days’ observation.

¹²² Julia Loktev, “Static Motion, or the Confessions of a Radio Driver”, in *Radiotext(e)*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1993, “The car is likely to be your most intensive radio listening experience, perhaps even your most intensive media experience altogether. Usually the radio is a background medium; but in the car it becomes all-pervasive, all-consuming.” p.204.

congregation. "A lofty pulpit without stairs" is the phrase used in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* to describe the pulpit in Father Mapple's chapel. "It had a perpendicular ladder at the side. The preacher pulled the ladder in after him when he ascended, leaving him impregnable in his little Quebec."¹²³ This is a memorable image of a pulpit, shaped like the prow of a ship, which appears like a "self-contained stronghold", withdrawn and isolated from the world.¹²⁴ It could easily be transformed into a metaphor for preaching which remains distant and isolated from listeners. The results of such distancing are sermons that are delivered "in public", but often to private gatherings behind closed church doors. Such sermons too regularly retreat into one-way proclamation rather than two-way conversation. This "distant" approach to preaching can easily slide into non-communication.

This section has attempted to demonstrate some of the ways in which radio has adapted to the television age.¹²⁵ A number of transitions within the sphere of radio have been considered. The move away from static, communal listening patterns towards more individualised and mobile listening habits, has been placed alongside the increased choice of output, the rapid technological developments in radio and the shift towards a more conversational form of broadcast talk. These are but a few of the continuing transformations which have taken place in radio broadcasting since the arrival of television. They should not be viewed as conscious adaptations made by radio broadcasters to survive in the age of television, but they have nonetheless assisted radio's survival, and perhaps given new meaning to the title of C.B.S.'s 1939 radio show: "Seems Radio is Here to Stay."¹²⁶

It has also been argued that it is important to recognise that both radio and preaching each have their own distinctive characteristics. This is one reason why

¹²³ Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, New York: Signet, 1956, pp.55-56.

¹²⁴ The *Moby Dick* analogy is also made use of by Ronald E. Sleeth, *God's Word and Our Words*. Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1986, p.94.

¹²⁵ For a far fuller account of how this took place in America, see Peter Fornatale and Joshua E. Mills, *Radio in the Television Age*, Woodstock, New York: Overlook Press, 1980.

¹²⁶ Norman Corwin wrote and produced, "Seems Radio is Here to Stay" for CBS, 1939. See also: Mary Ann Watson, "Seems Radio is Here to Stay", in Edward C. Pease and Everetter E. Dennis, editors, *Radio - The Forgotten Medium*, London: Transaction Publishers, 1995 [1993], pp.195-6.

homileticians seeking to learn from radio broadcasters should not attempt to draw uncritically from these transformations in radio. The significant point about radio's survival can be summed up with one word: adaptation. One central reason for radio's survival has been its ability to adapt to its changing communicative environment. To be able to affirm that it "seems preaching is here to stay", then, preachers must not forget this principle of adaptation.

3. Radio Theory and Practice: In Praise of Pictorial Language?

Certain characteristics of radio have not, however, had to adapt. This is because they are intrinsic to radio broadcasting itself. One of the first scholars to consider seriously the foundations of radio broadcasting was the "aesthetician and psychologist" Rudolf Arnheim.¹²⁷ *Radio*, published in 1936 whilst Arnheim was in his early thirties, has been described as a "lost classic".¹²⁸ It is an intriguing text which deserves a wider audience. Arnheim deftly explores topics such as the "World of Sound", "Spatial Resonance" and "Sequence and Juxtaposition" in radio.¹²⁹ He appears less concerned with radio adapting itself, and more interested in the defining characteristics of radio. Part of his seventh chapter, "In Praise of Blindness", is particularly germane for the current discussion, in that he considers some of the distinctive characteristics of radio. The fact that this section of Arnheim's work has also recently been republished, perhaps signals its contemporary relevance.¹³⁰

His argument merits detailed consideration. Three themes emerge which are especially pertinent and will be analysed: first, the primacy of sight, secondly, the sufficiency of sound, and thirdly, the dangers of the imagination. These views will

¹²⁷ See: David A. Pariser, "Rudolf Arnheim", in Roland Turner, editor, *Thinkers of the Twentieth Century*, London: St. James Press, 1987, p.21.

¹²⁸ *Radiotext(e)*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1993, p.11.

¹²⁹ Rudolph Arnheim, *Radio*, Translated by Margaret Ludwig and Herbert Read, London: Faber and Faber, 1936. See chapters 2, 4 and 5. Hereafter referred to as Rudolph Arnheim, *Radio*, 1936.

¹³⁰ Part of this chapter by Rudolph Arnheim has recently been reproduced as, "In Praise of Blindness", in *Radiotext(e)*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1993, pp.20-25.

also be evaluated on the basis of theoretical understandings of radio and the practice of certain broadcasting contemporaries of Arnheim.

i. The Primacy of Sight

One of Arnheim's foundational points is the primacy of sight and therefore the limitations of radio:

.....wireless rules out a certain range of senses in a most startling way. It seems much more sensorily defective and incomplete than the other arts - because it excludes the most important sense, that of sight. In silent films the deficiency of speech was scarcely noticed, for mere sight already gives a most comprehensive picture of the world..... The eye alone gives a very complete picture of the world, but the ear alone gives an incomplete one.¹³¹

Notice how this understanding of radio is built upon a number of presuppositions. First, "the eye" alone grasps a more "complete" picture of reality than the ear. Secondly, "the ear" alone provides "an incomplete" picture of reality. It would be possible to infer from this text that Arnheim values the eye above the ear, as "the eye alone" gives a "very complete picture of the world." Two words, "alone" and "complete", used here by Arnheim appear particularly open to contest. They combine to leave the reader with the impression that the other senses: touch, taste, smell, and hearing, contribute little, if anything, to a "complete" picture of the world. This ignores the power of the other senses to shape the picture of the world we perceive.¹³²

ii. The Sufficiency of Sound

Arnheim's argument for the primacy of sight appears at first glance to be contradicted by his belief in the sufficiency of sound. This is misleading, particularly if the tone of

¹³¹ Rudolph Arnheim, *Radio*, 1936, pp. 134 -135.

¹³² The multi-sensorial nature of human perception is an important point. It will be considered in greater detail in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

the entire book is taken into account. *Radio* should be read as an apologia for and celebration of the wireless. As a defender and celebrator of this form of broadcasting, Arnheim appears keen to demonstrate the particular qualities of radio. In a word, it is “sound” which sets radio apart. In a provocative passage he argues that “nothing is lacking” in the world of sound, which also “offers unity by aural means”.¹³³ The general thrust of his argument is that radio may lack appeal to the primary sense of sight, but this does not invalidate its own unique contribution to communication. He is, therefore, not contradicting his high view of sight with this dramatic claim for sound, rather he is attempting to highlight how much potential there is in the “soundspace”¹³⁴ created by radio.

“The aural world”, according to Arnheim, is “formally poor compared with the rich visual world”.¹³⁵ In his eyes this poverty presents the broadcaster with new challenges:

The wireless artist must develop a mastery of the limitations of the aural. The test of his talent is whether he can produce a perfect effect with aural things, not whether his broadcast is capable of inspiring his listeners to supplement the missing visual image as realistically and vividly as he can.¹³⁶

There is an unanticipated twist here in the argument, as he appears to be suggesting that broadcasters should rely on the “aural things” rather than inciting the visual in their listeners’ minds. This is made more explicit in one of the most surprising passages in the whole book:

Seen from the wireless point of view, one must make it quite clear that the urge of the listener to imagine with the inner eye is *not* worth encouraging, but, on the contrary, is a great hindrance to an appreciation of the real nature of wireless and the particular advantages that it alone can offer.¹³⁷

¹³³ *ibid.*, p.135.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, p.148.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p.170.

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, p.136.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, p.137. (*Italics* are mine.)

He appears to be negating the whole role of the visual imagination in listening to radio. The oft-quoted folk-sentiment: "I like radio best, because the pictures are better!" would find little support from Arnheim. The strength of the wireless is to be found in its aural nature, not in its ability to provoke, incite, and encourage listeners to paint pictures in their minds. He makes clear the "particular advantages" of the "pure aural world".¹³⁸ In his eyes, in radio the "disappearance of the visual", heightens the "power of symbolism".¹³⁹ For Arnheim, one of the greatest strengths of radio is that it relies entirely on hearing, hence the "sufficiency of sound".

In his later and better known book, *Visual Thinking*,¹⁴⁰ his understanding of the senses is more nuanced: "In vision and hearing, shapes, colours, movements, sounds are susceptible to definite and highly complex organisation in space and time."¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, Arnheim retains an extremely high regard for sight. This extends to his belief that: "Vision is the primary medium of thought."¹⁴² It is this linking of vision and thought which is at the heart of a considerable number of Arnheim's ideas. In the eyes of David Pariser, a commentator on Arnheim, "much of his prolific output is based upon the concept of visual thinking - the idea that vision itself is the primary modality of thought."¹⁴³

A reading of *Visual Thinking* supports this interpretation of Arnheim's work. He argues, for example, that "concepts are perceptual images" and "thought operations are the handling of images"¹⁴⁴ and later he suggests that "thinking calls for images, and images contain thought".¹⁴⁵ If this is the case, then the views presented in this later work, *Visual Thinking* (1970), provide ammunition with which to challenge his understanding of the sufficiency of sound expounded in his work on *Radio* (1936); on

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p.193.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, p.171.

¹⁴⁰ Rudolph Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*, London: Faber and Faber, 1970.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.18.

¹⁴² *ibid.*, p.18.

¹⁴³ David A. Pariser, "Rudolf Arnheim" in Roland Turner, editor, *Thinkers of the Twentieth Century*, Second Edition, London: St. James Press, 1987.

¹⁴⁴ Rudolph Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*, London: Faber and Faber, 1970, p.227.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.254.

the grounds that if concepts and thinking rely as heavily on images as he suggests, then surely it is logical to aim to create images to engage the mind and assist the listener's thought processes. The "inner eye" may after all be "worth encouraging".

iii. The Dangers of the Imagination

Arnheim argues strongly against such a viewpoint, suggesting that the "visual must be left out and must not be smuggled in by the listener's power of visual imagination".¹⁴⁶ He later supports his case by creating an imaginary scenario of an over "imaginative" listener who imagines "the actual situation of the studio and the performer at the microphone." He believes that the listener should rather restrict "himself to the reception of pure sound, which comes to him through the loudspeaker, purged of the materiality of its source."¹⁴⁷ This appears to be an over-literalistic understanding of how listeners might imagine the situation that they are hearing. Part of the power of radio is to go beyond the studio, as the source of the broadcast, and elicit a new, imaginary picture.

Perhaps some of the reason for Arnheim's fierce critique of provoking the visual through radio is because of his dislike for the then popular sound "relays" to theatres or concert-halls which in his view unnaturally separated sound from vision. In his eyes, this unnatural dichotomy can confuse the listener and leads to an "incomprehensible noise".¹⁴⁸ He also argues that:

A grievous wrong is done to any work of art, however humble, if the audible is rudely torn from the wholeness of the visual-plus-acoustic impression and presented alone.¹⁴⁹

Arnheim is not arguing against radio itself, instead he is highlighting the limitations of "relay" broadcasting, which was common in the early days of radio. His argument

¹⁴⁶ Rudolph Arnheim, *Radio*, 1936, pp.135-6.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.142.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.139.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.141.

was partially based on the belief that unless listeners were informed about what is happening, it can almost be impossible to decipher some noises broadcast via radio relays. His overall view on this issue is uncompromising, and can be summed up in two words: “abolish relays”.¹⁵⁰

A number of imperatives have emerged from Arnheim’s argument. First, acknowledge the importance of sight. Secondly, recognise the aural quality of sound alone, and therefore rely upon the use of “aural things” to communicate to the listener. Thirdly, and perhaps most surprisingly, do not attempt to elicit pictures with words in the listener’s imagination. It is this third point that is most open to further theoretical and practical criticism.

iv. A Theoretical Critique of “Blindness”.

In his fifth chapter in *Radio*, Arnheim advocates the creation of soundscapes, by the “juxtaposition” of contrasting *sounds*, such as effects from: war and peace, midday bustle and quiet night, as well as the stock exchange and country market.¹⁵¹ This kind of approach, he maintains, has the potential to create “new worlds of the senses in which actual space and time-relations are of no value.”¹⁵² Thus whilst he rejects the use of pictorial language he is happy to embrace sounds to bring together divergent experiences, which will create a highly evocative soundscape.

More specifically he imagines the “peaceful chime of a church-clock” breaking in on a “noisy brawl”, or the “faint echoes of a funeral march” cutting across the “lively twitter” of birds in the countryside.¹⁵³ This bringing together of contrasting sounds may not be as purely aural as Arnheim maintains, for surely part of the power of such juxtapositioning lies in its capacity to evoke images in the listeners’ imaginations.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.141.

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.120.

¹⁵² *ibid.*, p.120.

¹⁵³ *ibid.*, p.122.

¹⁵⁴ Interestingly, a similar technique also lies at the heart of Paul Scott Wilson’s understanding of how the imagination can be assisted in preaching. He calls it the “juxtaposition of opposites” (p.46).

Sounds naturally evoke visual memories of sights such as “church-clocks” or “funeral marches.” Given the multiplicity and variety of electronically produced pictures in the television age it seems likely that many images embedded in listeners’ memories may be released by sounds or by word pictures on the radio. It is not surprising that certain broadcasters have worked on the assumption that there is an accumulation of images, derived from electronic sources, in listeners’ minds. For example, Ronald Reagan often “evoked televised images on radio” and built his “arguments from a visual scene that he and the nation” had “recently experienced.”¹⁵⁵

As well as recalling or reproducing images taken from an electronic source, listeners also have the ability to create or reshape mental images from their own personal experience. Adam Powell, director of Technology Studies at the Freedom Forum Media Centre, argues:

Radio is powerful..... Television and movies may expose us to new experiences in specific detail, but radio and literature are unique in engaging the imagination, permitting us to create our own image in the mind’s eye..... radio, along with the printed word forces us to collaborate with the medium as an active participant.¹⁵⁶

This view of the power of radio, which highlights its ability to engage the imagination of the listener by “permitting” the creation of “our own image in the mind’s eye”, is an important counter to Arnheim’s understanding. Perhaps one of the most significant words in this extract is “participant”. Having the space to draw their own images liberates listeners to **participate** or **interact** with what they are hearing. “As W.H. Auden expresses it, ‘the disembodied voices of radio..... can present such things convincingly, for the imagination of the listener is not spoiled by any collision with visual reality’.”¹⁵⁷ This balances the point made earlier, that listeners draw solely

Both Arnheim and Wilson support using surprising juxtapositions. Wilson memorably suggests, for example, preaching on the *marriage* at Cana at a *funeral*. See: Paul Scott Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart - New Understandings in Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988, p.55.

¹⁵⁵ Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Eloquence in An Electronic Age - The Transforming of Political Speechmaking*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, pp.126-7.

¹⁵⁶ Adam Clayton Powell III, “You are What You Hear”, in *Radio: The Forgotten Medium*, 1995, p.75.

¹⁵⁷ Elwyn Evans, *Radio - A Guide to Broadcasting Techniques*, London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1977, p.111. Unfortunately I was unable to locate original source for W.H.Auden quote.

upon what they have already seen to create their imagined pictures, with the idea that the “visualising process can be extended to create characters and settings that would defy actualisation on stage or screen.”¹⁵⁸ I am, therefore, arguing that such understandings of the creative and the derivative power of the imagination challenge Arnheim’s belief that radio broadcasters should not encourage the use of the “inner eye” or “visual imagination”.¹⁵⁹

The creative potential of the listener’s imagination is highlighted by Adam Powell’s intriguing claim for radio:

As a result, the pictures are better on radio: What you can imagine is almost always scarier, funnier, more real and more vivid than the explicit images of video and film...¹⁶⁰

He correctly challenges the assumption that the explicit images of video and film will necessarily be more vivid than the implicit ones of radio. Powell’s generalised assertion for radio is open to contention, especially if “pictures” are read in a literalist fashion. Nevertheless, the claim for the potential power of the imagination should not be ignored.

One of the strengths of Arnheim’s case, however, is his emphasis upon the richness to be found in the aural quality of radio. There is a real danger of perceiving radio solely as a word-based medium. Such a view is too simple. It fails to recognise the variety of resources available to radio producers and broadcasters: music, sound effects, silence and audio montages can combine to form a medium more “visual” even than

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.111.

¹⁵⁹ See “An analytic of Imagination and Images” in chapter 7 of John McIntyre, *Faith, Theology and Imagination*, Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1987. McIntyre lists 12 functions or capacities of the imagination. Two categories which perhaps parallel my argument here are McIntyre’s “synoptic and integrative” and “creative and constructive” functions of the imagination. See also Chapter 3 section 1.iv of this thesis and the discussion of “Imagination”.

¹⁶⁰ Adam C. Powell III, “You are What You Hear”, in *Radio: The Forgotten Medium*, 1995, p.75.

television.¹⁶¹ An approach that focuses entirely on “word radio” also ignores the variety of genres of radio broadcasting currently filling the air waves.¹⁶²

This fourth section has provided “a theoretical critique” of certain aspects of Arnheim’s understanding of radio broadcasting. His insights regarding the aural character of radio are useful, as he highlights both the limitations and strengths of the medium. For Arnheim, radio’s reliance upon sound is a limitation. I am in agreement with Arnheim when he argues that this constraint can be used to creative effect if the broadcaster develops “a mastery of the limitations of the aural”.¹⁶³ Alongside these perceptive observations is a more debatable contention. It has been suggested that Arnheim’s understanding of how to engage the listeners’ imagination is open to criticism. This critique will be developed further in the following section.

v. A Practical Critique of “Blindness”

Arnheim’s case can also be evaluated through the practices of certain radio broadcasters. Two practitioners who worked contemporaneously with Arnheim stand out. The first, Richard Dimbleby, made his name as a young reporter with one of the first live radio broadcasts in 1936, the same year as Arnheim’s *Radio* was published in English. He made a live report from a telephone near to Crystal Palace as it was engulfed in flames.¹⁶⁴ Veracity and drama were added to his report both by the excited tone of his voice, and even more evocatively, by the sounds of “shouts, firebells and the crackle of flames” in the background.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ “Visual” is used here in a non-literal sense.

¹⁶² In the UK, Virgin 1215, Atlantic 252, Classic FM, Radio 1, 2, and 3 as well as the majority of Independent Radio stations rely heavily on music. BBC Radio 4 lives up to the name of its new rival: Talk Radio. The UK’s 39 BBC local radio stations have recently been “ordered to provide quality speech programming on ever-waning budgets”. Gillian Reynolds, “Radio Future, *Radio and Audience Attitudes*, London: John Libbey, 1994. p.60.

¹⁶³ Rudolph Arnheim, *Radio*, 1936, p.136.

¹⁶⁴ Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting - Volume One 1922-1939 - Serving the Nation*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991. The fire at Crystal Palace was Richard Dimbleby’s “first big story..... listeners heard his excited voice, from a telephone booth on the spot. It was the first up-to-the minute, on-the-spot radio report of a major news story and it scooped the Newspapers”. p.123.

¹⁶⁵ Andrew Crisell, *Understanding Radio*, Second Edition, London: Routledge, 1994. p.20.

This example illustrates some of the different elements which can make up a successful radio report. It does not, however, challenge the primacy of the verbal in radio. Without words these background sounds would have had little meaning. The crackles could easily have been confused as static, the bells as lost music from another station and the muffled shouts a product of interference. It was Dimbleby's voice that brought order out of potential chaos. The "actuality" in the background added colour and atmosphere to his verbal report.

There is, therefore, an important distinction to be made between the tools which are essential for clear communication by radio, and the additional resources which make it more effective as a means of communication. For making sense of the situation, it was essential that Dimbleby's verbal description cut through the ether. The dramatic impact of his words, however, were enhanced by the sounds in the background, the tone of his voice, and the complete novelty of this form of live radio reporting.

A second figure stands out alongside Richard Dimbleby as an early master of radio broadcasting. Ed Murrow, the American war correspondent, spent much of the Second World War in London.¹⁶⁶ He has been called a "reporter-preacher".¹⁶⁷ One of his greatest skills was the ability to paint what he called "the little picture":

One night last week I stood in front of a smashed grocery store and heard a dripping inside. It was the only sound in all London. Two cans of peaches had been drilled through by flying glass and the juice was dripping down onto the floor.¹⁶⁸

Crisell interestingly interprets Richard Dimbleby's coverage of the Crystal Palace Fire in 1936 as one of the key events in the early history of British radio. It "occurred after the evening papers had shut down and before the morning papers had appeared, and was the BBC's first scoop." This "demonstrated that as a news medium radio is not only quicker than newspapers but more 'concrete' in the sense that it can convey the sound that it reports." p.20.

¹⁶⁶ Alexander Kendrick, *Prime Time: The Life of Edward R. Murrow*. Boston: Little Brown, 1969.

¹⁶⁷ William Stott explains the title of "reporter-preacher" in "Documenting Media", from David Crowley and Paul Heyer, editors, *Communication in History*, Second Edition, New York: Longman, 1995, p. 247, p.249. He argues that Murrow completely "identified with the British cause" and so "to avoid the term "propagandist", Murrow has been called a "reporter-preacher": see Robert Lewis Shayon, "The Two Men Who Were Murrow", *Columbia Journalism Review*, Fall 1969, p.51."

¹⁶⁸ This citation is drawn from William Stott's cultural history *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1973, 1986. He makes use of three supplementary sources : i) Edward R. Murrow, *This is London*, editor, Elmer Davis, New York:

It is interesting to notice his attention to minute detail. Here Murrow is homing in on one scene and more specifically, one sound. It is hard not to hear the “drip, drip,” of the peach juice and to imagine that this was indeed the “only sound in all London”.

At other times Murrow would perch himself on roof tops during the London Blitz. The result is some of the most evocative broadcasting of the war. For example, he describes how anti-aircraft barrages:

seemed to splash blobs of daylight down the streets..... The first two looked like some giant had thrown a huge basket of flaming oranges high in the air. The third was just a balloon of fire..... A shower of incendiaries came down in the far distance..... It looked like flashes from an electric train on a wet night, only the engineer was drunk and driving his train in circles through the streets.¹⁶⁹

He watches, he describes with the observation of a fine artist, and he communicates. It is not surprising that he was described as “the poet of the blitz.”¹⁷⁰ The sounds of planes and anti-aircraft fire combine with the repressed emotion in his voice to fashion a gripping commentary.¹⁷¹

As with Richard Dimbleby the verbal expression is the backbone of the report; the actuality adds colour, dimension and vitality. In the words of A.M. Sperber, one of Murrow’s biographers:

It was *The War of the Worlds* come to life, the fantasy of 1938 become the reality of 1940, the rooftop observer, reporting on the life and death of cities, no longer an actor in a studio.¹⁷²

1941, pp. vii, 172, 173; ii) Alexander Kendrick, *Prime Time: The Life of Edward R. Murrow*, Boston: 1969, pp. 107, 246, 247; iii) Edward R. Murrow and Fred W. Friendly, *See It Now*, New York, 1955, p.55.

¹⁶⁹ A.M. Sperber, *Murrow: His Life and Times*, New York: Freundlich Books, 1986, p.179.

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p.179. Sperber argues that Murrow’s “reflective, impressionistic pieces.... captured the public imagination and established his image as the poet of the blitz.”

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*, p.174. Sperber describes how Murrow’s “quiet narrative” of the evening of the Blitz on the programme *London After Dark* was “underscored by the steady crashes of anti-aircraft fire”.

¹⁷² A.M. Sperber, *Murrow: His Life and Times*, New York: Freundlich Books, 1986, p.174.

Often the power of visual language lies in its ability to tell a story. The dripping can of peaches, for example, tells the story of bombs, destruction and the shattering of normality in parts of London life.

Two further elements add to the power of Ed Murrow's verbal report: first, the story itself, it was "new" news. Secondly, Murrow himself had become part of the story. Here was no distant, objective news reader: he was an eyewitness. It was almost as if he had become the eyes of the listener as he described scenes such as "a rainbow bending over the battered East End as the all clear sounded" or a "flower shop intact among the ruins, a funeral wreath in the window".¹⁷³ Murrow believed that "these things must be seen", and through his evocative use of pictorial language "the audience saw them in vivid pictures that needed no TV cameras".¹⁷⁴

Both Dimbleby and Murrow flew in Lancaster bombers in separate missions over Berlin in 1943. They used their verbal reports to create "vivid pictures" and so became like "TV cameras" for their audiences. Dimbleby, for instance, spoke of a "tracery of sparkling silver searchlights lighting across the face of Berlin",¹⁷⁵ whilst Murrow moves from specific description to imaginative simile:

Jock [the pilot] was wearing woollen gloves with the fingers cut off.
I could see his fingernails turned white as he gripped the wheel.....
The small incendiaries went down like a fistful of white rice thrown
on a piece of black velvet, like great sunflowers gone mad.¹⁷⁶

Notice how representational pictorial language, describing specific details of what he sees, is juxtaposed with a more metaphorical use of pictorial language, which connects what he is seeing with other pictures of reality.

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, p.179.

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p.179. Other examples cited include: "A night bomber's exhaust trail was 'a pale ribbon stretched across the sky', and the glasses of an anti-aircraft spotter resembled the eyes of an overgrown owl."

¹⁷⁵ J.Dimbleby, *A Biography*, London: Book Club Associates, 1975. His son and biographer Johnathan Dimbleby cites parts of his Father's report on his flight with pilot Guy Gibson in a Lancaster bomber over Berlin.

¹⁷⁶ A.M. Sperber, *Murrow: His Life and Times*, New York: Freundlich Books, 1986, p.179.

The broadcasting practice of these two journalists raise a number of questions about the practical viability of aspects of Rudolph Arnheim's approach. First, if Murrow or Dimpleby had followed Arnheim's advice, and not painted pictures for the "inner eye" of listeners, their reports would have been considerably flatter and less memorable. Even their shocking accounts of visits to Buchenwald¹⁷⁷ and Belsen¹⁷⁸ immediately after liberation would have lacked force had they followed Arnheim's suggestion. Secondly, if they had cut out the live actuality in the background, whether fire bells or bombs, for fear of provoking the listeners' visual imaginations, their reports would again have been far less powerful. Thirdly, if they had relied on the "sufficiency of sound" and only broadcast the noise of fires crackling juxtaposed with the swish of hoses spraying, then the resulting broadcast would have been more than a little incoherent. In short, the methods used, with such popular appeal, by Dimpleby and Murrow highlight the weaknesses of some of Arnheim's central assertions.

The work of Rudolph Arnheim has been outlined and evaluated. Both the strengths and weaknesses of his studies have been noted, through a theoretical and a more practical discussion. In particular, it has been argued that Arnheim's provocative chapter on "In Praise of Blindness" has a number of significant weaknesses. This section has attempted to demonstrate that it would be a mistake for broadcasters to follow Arnheim's advice and not attempt to paint word pictures which might appeal to the listener's "inner eye". As it was also argued in the previous section Arnheim is right to identify radio's reliance on sound, but he has failed to understand that the creation of pictures with words is a vital skill for broadcasters. This is because listeners have to rely on what they hear in order to see what the broadcaster is witnessing.

¹⁷⁷ E. Murrow, *News Talk - Buchenwald*, 15th April 1945, from Caversham: BBC Archives. See also Ed Murrow, "Broadcast from Buchenwald", in *Radiotext(e)*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1993, pp.152-4.

¹⁷⁸ Ludovic Kennedy introduces: *Richard Dimpleby - Voice of the Nation*, London: BBC Videos, 1990.

Such support for the use of pictorial language raises a number of important questions relevant not only to radio broadcasters, but also to preachers. First, how do the radio broadcaster and the preacher create the “little picture” and the “visual story”?

Today, it is almost a “homiletical given” to argue that “preaching needs to become more visual”.¹⁷⁹ If this is taken as a prerequisite in our “televisual age”, then it makes sense to investigate how radio broadcasters practise this skill. Secondly, how important is the language chosen for portraying these snapshots? Thirdly, which communication factors can add to or detract from effective communication through these verbal pictures? These questions will be considered later in the thesis. A fourth question, which has already been touched upon, needs to be asked first: Why should preachers develop their use of pictorial language? The following chapter will attempt to answer this.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused primarily on the world of speech radio broadcasting. It has attempted to argue that whilst radio has gone through a number of crises, it is also the case that, in the words of the chair of the Broadcasting Standards Council, by “the mid-1990s it is clear that radio has a powerful present and a bright future”.¹⁸⁰ It has been suggested that radio’s continued survival and growth is partially due to its ability to adapt.

The adaptation, for example, towards a more conversational form of discourse was concentrated upon. This has the potential to bring about what Scannell describes as “a de-severance”,¹⁸¹ which he explains as meaning “something like to abolish distance or farness, i.e. to bring close, to bring within range.”¹⁸² It was suggested that radio

¹⁷⁹ See also: Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Imagery for Preaching*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989; and Derek Weber, *Preaching in a Televisual Age*, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Edinburgh University, 1993.

¹⁸⁰ Lady Howe, “Foreword” in Andrea Hargrave, editor, *Radio and Audience Attitudes*, London: John Libbey, 1994, p.vii.

¹⁸¹ Paddy Scannell, *Radio, Television and Modern Life*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, p.167. This is how Paddy Scannell translates Martin Heidegger’s phrase “*entfernung*”, from Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1962, p.138, n.2.

¹⁸² *ibid.*, p.167.

broadcasters developed a more conversational style of communication. This helped to “abolish distance” and bring the listener “closer” to speaker. It was also argued that as listeners have become immersed in this style of conversational speech, they have grown accustomed to a more intimate form of public speaking. They will, therefore, resist being “spoken at” by speakers.

Homiletics have much to learn from how broadcasters quickly adapted to this style of speech and how listeners’ expectations have changed; but they must also recognise that radio broadcasting has a character distinct from preaching. A critical reading of theorists such as Arnheim can provide useful insights into the inherent nature of radio. Not all of his arguments, however, stand up to rigorous theoretical and practical critiques. In particular, his negative view of pictorial language has been challenged. It has been implied that the skill of engaging listeners’ visual imaginations through pictorial language is a significant one for those seeking to hold their audience’s attention.

The use of pictorial language can assist listeners to move from being mere recipients of “distribution”, to being participants in the communicative act. This ancient art deserves to be preserved and developed in order to assist in the shift from a one-way “distribution” model to a two-way “communication” model. The latter approach has the potential to paint pictures “on the mind without the use of the graphic arts”.¹⁸³ Speakers may be able to break free of their communication fortresses by using verbal pictures which resonate with their listeners’ experiences. As receivers or decoders, hearers are not passive recipients of these pictures; they are provided with the opportunity of creating or recreating their own images on the basis of what they have heard. It can thus become a co-creative act. This may not be direct two-way communication, but it encourages listeners to take a more active part in the listening process.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Peter Brooks, *Communicating Conviction*, London: Epworth, 1983, p.76.

¹⁸⁴ The extent to which this use of pictorial language has taken and is taking place amongst religious radio broadcasters in the USA and the UK will be considered later in this thesis.

This understanding of how radio can work stands directly counter to Marshall McLuhan's. He described radio as a "hot medium", because it was "low in participation", in contrast to a "cool medium", like television which was "high in participation or completion by the audience".¹⁸⁵ McLuhan appears to have missed one of the central strengths of radio. If handled correctly it can encourage listeners to participate in the creation of images in the mind and so complete the communicative act. In other words speech radio can be a "cool medium" which is "high in participation" and "completion" by the audience.

Speakers who ignore their audience's role in the communicative process and treat their radio stations as broadcasting battle-ships, from which they bombard their listeners with words, or preachers who withdraw to the safety of their ship-like pulpits and fire utterances like cannon-balls towards their congregation, are in danger of missing the "seamless web of invisible strands"¹⁸⁶ which words can weave.

An alternative approach may be founded upon careful listening, and draw upon conversational discourse and pictorial language. The result may be a form of oral discourse which draws speaker and listener closer together. Before moving on to analyse examples of radio religious broadcasters' attempts to connect with their listeners, it is important to investigate some other facets of our communicative context. It is to the audio-visual stimuli that we now turn.

¹⁸⁵ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media - The Extensions of Man*, London: Ark, 1987 (1964), p.22-3.

¹⁸⁶ Robert Bridges, *The Testament of Beauty*, London: 1930, Book 1, Line 721-33.

Chapter 3. **Audio-Visual Culture: The Challenge of Electronic Stereotypes**

At the heart of this thesis is the issue of how to communicate orally and effectively in a society where a whole range of audio-visual stimuli compete for the congregation's or audience's attention. The first two chapters have explored the ways in which theorists and practitioners in the fields of homiletics and radio have responded to this question. In particular, it has been argued that homileticians have much to learn from radio broadcasters. It has also been suggested that preachers and radio broadcasters must take seriously the implications of working within and being part of an audio-visual culture, and it is with this that the present chapter will be concerned.

A number of connected arguments will be made. By way of introduction, it will be argued that preachers, seeking to be heard today, also need to engage critically with their communicative environment. The first section will also define two important terms for this chapter: "electronic stereotype" and "audio-visual culture". Secondly, since a central element of this audio-visual culture is television, it will be suggested that there is a need to develop appropriate skills for interpreting televisual texts. Three ways of considering television will be considered in the second section. One in particular, an "interpretative approach", will be defended. In the third section, this approach will be applied to the analysis of a number of specific audio-visual texts. On the basis of this analysis, the implications for oral communicators will be outlined. In particular, it will be argued that interpreters of audio-visual texts should deconstruct electronic stereotypes.

1. Introduction: A Case for Critical Engagement

Preachers today face a highly competitive communicative environment. Members of their congregation on Sundays will already have glanced at a weekend paper, listened to the radio, or caught sight of an advertising hoarding before entering church. Some of their listeners will have spent several hours the evening before relaxing in front of

Saturday night television,¹ some will have snuggled down to view one of over 7 million videos rented each week in the UK.² Others will have passed into the world of celluloid dreams, gazing at digitally formed images, while immersed in quadraphonic surround-sound at the local cinema or multiplex.³ An increasing proportion will have been exploring the multi-media universe of computer games, or surfing the World Wide Web. Given these diverse and sometimes rich media experiences, it is not surprising that listening to one voice, whilst seated on a wooden church pew or plastic chair, compares unfavourably. A pulpit monologue can tax the attention not only of visitors but also of regular church-goers. Even in churches renowned for their preaching ministries, it is not uncommon to hear the sermon described as a “frustrating” and “tedious” experience.⁴

i. Towards Critical Engagement

The rapidly evolving communicative situation has serious implications for anyone hoping to communicate orally and effectively. The mass media, and television in particular, represents a central element of this setting. As was suggested earlier in this thesis, preachers cannot afford to ignore this vital aspect of their listeners’ context. With the rapid development, expansion and convergence of communication technologies in the late 1990s, I would contend that preachers need, more than ever, to engage critically with their communicative environment.

¹ “Watching television is still the nation’s most common home-based leisure activity for both men and women in Great Britain, with virtually everyone watching..... People watched an average of over 25 hours of television a week” in 1995. Jenny Church, editor, *Social Trends 27, 1997, Edition*, London: Stationary Office, pp.215-6.

² See: *Fact File 1993*, Carlisle: Caryl Press, p.53. “In 1990, for example, 14.8 million households owned a video recorder/player and an average of 7.3 million tapes were hired each week.” Derek Weber, *Preaching To Be Heard in a Television Age*, Edinburgh: Unpublished PhD, Edinburgh University, 1993, p.12. More recent statistics suggest that the amount spent on video rental has declined from £570million in 1989 to £440million in 1995. This may be explained by the huge increase in video retail sales, from only £15million in 1985 to £790 million in 1995. Jenny Church, editor, *Social Trends 27, 1997, Edition*, London: Stationary Office, p.216.

³ A few others might have gone to the theatre, attended a concert or even relaxed with a good book.

⁴ See: Mark Greene, *The Three-Eared Preacher*, Edinburgh: Unpublished MTh Dissertation, Edinburgh University, 1996.

This environment is described by some scholars as a “visual culture”⁵ and by others as an “audio-visual culture”.⁶ Behind both terms lies the belief that our context has been significantly shaped by a series of revolutions and/or evolutions in communications,⁷ the result of which is that we now work and play in a media saturated society. A central aspect of this changing context is the huge range of electronically formed images which currently bombard our imaginations. Our communicative environment can be likened to a wall of video monitors playing out many different scenes - it has many faces.

A second underlying assumption of the case set out here is that in the midst of the digitalisation of media,⁸ the subsequent convergence of technologies, and the ensuing move towards globalisation,⁹ television remains a key force in our audio-visual culture, and so is the focus of this chapter. It is important, however, to emphasise that television is but one element of our mediated audio-visual culture, a culture which has the potential to nurture beliefs,¹⁰ influence opinions and subtly transform our understanding of the world in which we live.¹¹

⁵ Chris Jenks, editor, *Visual Culture*, London: Routledge, 1995. See: Quentin Schultze, *Redeeming Television*, Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1992. Schultze states: “It’s popular these days to refer to America as a ‘visual culture’.” p.83.

⁶ Henk Hoekstra and Marjeet Verbeek, “Possibilities of Audiovisual Narrative” in Philip J. Rossi and Paul A. Soukup’s, editors, *Mass Media and the Moral Imagination*, Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1994. They argue that the “audiovisual culture” represents “the culture of the masses”. p.215.

⁷ David Crowley and Paul Heyer, *Communication in History*, Second Edition, Whiteplains, New York: Longman, 1995. This is an extremely useful collection of 42 essays, articles and book excerpts, covering a range of themes related to a wide range of communication evolutions and revolutions.

⁸ See: George Gilder, *Life After Television, The Coming Transformation of Media and American Life*, Revised Edition, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1994. This imaginative book considers the new developments in computer and fibre optic technology. Gilder anticipates the death of traditional television and telephony, and the rise of the teleputer (telecomputer). His fascinating case fails to recognise the significant role which television still plays in our current communicative context.

⁹ See: Cees J. Hamelink, “Globalisation and human dignity: The case of the information superhighway”, in *Media Development*, vol. XLIII, 1/1996, pp. 18-21.

¹⁰ “Potential” is an important word in this context, as it illustrates that this assertion does not reflect a deterministic or instrumentalist view of media effects. An understanding of “the active audience” or viewers as active participants in the communicative act is a vital corrective to seeing the audience simply passively drinking in media messages. See: Virginia Nightingale, *Studying Audiences - The Shock of the Real*, London: Routledge, 1996, “The active audience”, pp.7-9, and *passim*.

¹¹ John Eldridge, Jenny Kitzinger and Kevin Williams, *The Mass Media and Power in Modern Britain*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. They argue that: “the processes of reception and consumption *mediate*, but do not necessarily *undermine*, media power. Acknowledging that audiences are ‘active’ does not mean that the media are ineffectual. Recognizing the role of

A third underlying contention of this chapter is that homileticians, seeking to learn from radio broadcasters, also need to recognise that preaching and radio do not take place in a communicative vacuum. No discussion of radio can afford to ignore our audio-visual culture, particularly television, especially since radio has successfully adapted to a televisual environment.¹²

A fourth reason for engaging in a critical analysis of television relates to an important strand of the argument in the last chapter: pictorial language. It was argued, on both theoretical and practical grounds, that the use of verbal pictures is an important technique in good radio broadcast practice.¹³ Preachers wishing to use this skill today need to develop the ability to interpret critically visual imagery from television, especially because many of their listeners will be familiar with this form of audio-visual language. A critical engagement with televisual texts has the potential not only to enrich preachers' appreciation of our communicative context, but also to enable them to create verbal pictures which will resonate with their listeners' experience of television. The chapter will contain examples of critical engagement with a number of audio-visual texts.

In contrast to radio, television has an extensive critical discourse.¹⁴ A variety of approaches for interpreting televisual material will be outlined in this chapter. The sheer complexity and diversity of our audio-visual culture necessitates a highly selective approach. Rather than attempting a "broad-brush" discussion, specific examples from television will be considered. A critical engagement with audio-visual texts will therefore need to be sensitive to a range of issues, and in particular the belief that television programmes can often reinforce certain religious stereotypes.

'interpretation' does not invalidate the concept of 'influence'..... in spite of audience 'activity' in all its forms, the media help to shape perceptions of key social issues." p.160.

¹² See previous chapter of this thesis, in particular section 2: "Radio in Transformation".

¹³ For a more extensive discussion of this theme see Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis.

¹⁴ See previous chapter of this thesis, in particular section 1. iii on "The Academic Neglect of Radio".

ii. "Electronic Stereotypes" Examined

It will be suggested later in this chapter that televisual portrayals, as a central aspect of our audio-visual culture, have the potential to create and reinforce religious stereotypes, but also have the potential to subvert them. This assertion, if correct, adds further weight to the case for critical engagement with audio-visual texts. Before proceeding with the argument, it is important to outline at this stage what is meant by electronic stereotype.

The word "stereo-type" derives its meaning from type-setting in the printing process, where a metallic plate of fixed type was cast from the original mould of movable type. The sense was "reproducing without variations". Now the word carries the more negative connotations of reproducing with "dull uniformity", "conventionalising" or "presenting in the same way".¹⁵ The process of stereotyping can reduce three-dimensional characters into one dimensional portrayals. As sociologist David Barrat indicates: "the concept of stereotype, as a kind of 'blinkered' mental attitude, is a notion imported into media study from psychology."¹⁶ "Electronic stereotype" will be used in this thesis to refer to limited or blinkered portrayals generated by or communicated through the electronic media, such as television, film and video.

Considerable work has been done in analysing the mass media's stereotyping based on gender. "From bra-burning feminists to house-proud housewives, from sex-crazed seductresses to neurotic career-women, the media regularly serve a menu of female

¹⁵ G.M. Garmonsway, compiler, *The Penguin English Dictionary*, second edition, London: Penguin, 1969, p.689. For another comparable definition see also *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991. "A *preconceived and oversimplified* idea of the characteristics which typify a person, situation, etc.; an attitude based on such a preconception. Also a person who appears to conform closely to the idea of a type." p.651 (*italics mine*).

¹⁶ David Barrat, *Media Sociology*, London: Routledge, 1990, p.42. Barrat makes a helpful distinction between psychological and sociological views of stereotypes. In the psychological view, "the stereotype was seen as a rigid and unchanging attitude that was locked within the individual. Stereotypes were characteristically seen as expressions of hostility towards particular groups such as 'blacks' or 'Jews'..... Sociologists want to look beyond the individual to see the part played by stereotypes in society.....[and how it influences] quite complex social relationships..... To see stereotypes as applying to only distant and alien minorities makes us blind to the ways in which they affect our everyday dealings with the people around us." pp.44-5.

stereotypes that stimulates misogynistic taste buds.”¹⁷ Beyond the discussions about the film portrayals of Christ as a “blue-eyed film star”,¹⁸ there has, however, been less critical analysis of religious stereotypes. What they do focus on are: bible-thumping TV evangelists or the gossiping faithful in soap operas, faithless power-mad clerics or sexually abusing priests. There is some truth, or connection with reality, in many of these portrayals, but if they are isolated within news reports or dramas it could be inferred that these are the usual ways of faith. Alternatively such extreme portrayals are deemed newsworthy because they are set up against more drab stereotypes. Consider, for example, the portrayal of clergy in the news. Colin Seymour-Ure argues that:

when Churches do attract news..... it is often linked to a stereotype of clergy. The familiarity of a stereotype provides a reference point for stories that make news because they are ‘unpredictable within a certain range of what is expected’..... the basis is fictional, since most people have limited, if any direct experience. The image is constructed by conjecture or superficial observation, aided sometimes by the existence of a uniform..... increasingly in the last twenty years the stereotype has been maintained through broadcast media and the format of comedy series and light entertainment.¹⁹

Two further characteristics of stereotyping should be noted: conjecture and superficial observation. Combine these observations with the point that “stereotypes are

¹⁷ Myra Macdonald, *Representing Women, Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media*, London: Edward Arnold, 1995, p.13.

¹⁸ There is an increasing body of literature on film portrayals of Christ. See for example: i) Roy Kinnard and Tim Davis, *Divine Images - A History of Jesus on the Screen*, New York: Citadel Press, 1992. ii) Bruce Babington and Peter William Evans, *Biblical Epics, Sacred Narrative in the Hollywood Cinema*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993, especially pp. 110-126. iii) William R. Telford, “Jesus Christ Movie-Star: The Depiction of Jesus in the Cinema” in C.Marsh and G.Ortiz, editors, *Movies and Meaning - Explorations in Theology and Film*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997. iv) John O. Thompson, “Jesus as Moving Image: The Question of Movement” and David J. Graham, “Christ Imagery in Recent Film: A Saviour from Celluloid”, in Stanley E. Porter, Michael A. Hayes and David Tombs, *Images of Christ - Ancient and Modern*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997, pp.290-314. v) Margaret R. Miles, *Seeing and Believing - Religion and Values in the Movies*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996, pp.26-47.

¹⁹ Colin Seymour-Ure, *Must the Media be Bad News for Religion*, Canterbury: Centre for the Study of Religion and Society, Pamphlet No.1, pp.5-7. Earlier he had argued that: “The clergy comprise a kind of social élite, who attract attention not for the intrinsic interest of their actions but because those actions are done by clergy. Their distinction is marked for news media by the existence of a stereotype, epitomised in the dog collar. They will make news because they have done negative things.” p.3.

maintained through broadcast media", and a case emerges not only for defining, but also for deconstructing electronic stereotypes.

iii. Audio-Visual Culture

Another pitfall is to use the term "audio-visual culture" too loosely. There is a vast forest of definitions and discussions surrounding the single word "culture".²⁰ It is outside this dissertation's scope to venture far into such debates.²¹ The word itself will be used here in the "simple" external sense to refer to the environment which surrounds us, nurtures us and shapes us. It has implications for our "whole way of life",²² to adapt part of Raymond Williams' classic definition of culture.

Williams argues that:

A culture has two aspects: the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to; the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested. We use the word culture in these two senses; to mean a whole way of life - the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning - the special process of discovery and creative effort.²³

Williams' twofold definition is pertinent to the current discussion, as the word "culture" is being used in this thesis to refer to the environment which surrounds us, nurtures us and shapes us, and which therefore has the potential to reinforce existing meanings and also to create new meanings.

Some scholars use "visual culture" in a relatively narrow sense, as including painting, sculpture, design and architecture. This approach often falls into the trap of being

²⁰ See, for example, A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, New York: Vintage Books, 1963. They provide some 164 different definitions of culture.

²¹ For a recent useful introduction to this complex subject see: Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols - An Introduction to Faith and Culture*. London: DLT, 1997.

²² Raymond Williams, "Culture is Ordinary" (1958), pp.5-14, in Ann Gray and Jim McGuigan, editor, *Studying Culture: an introductory reader*, London: Edward Arnold, 1993, p.6.

²³ *ibid.*, p.4.

elitist, perceiving culture as the best or highest elements of visual artistic expression. For others, visual culture “could be taken to refer to all those items of culture whose visual appearance is an important feature of their being or their purpose.”²⁴ But in this thesis the term “visual culture” has been largely replaced by the term “audio-visual culture”.²⁵ This more inclusive term is primarily used to refer to our “communicative environment” where audio-visual media, such as television, film and video, act as the symbolic meaning-making systems which surround, reflect, nurture and even shape us.²⁶ This terminological shift is a highly significant point, especially for those seeking to communicate orally and effectively, as it points towards the variety of visual and aural stimuli which are competing to engage audiences’ imaginations.

iv. Imagination and Stereotypes

This raises a further important notion discussed in the previous chapters: the imagination. I would support James Jones, the Bishop of Hull, when he argues that the development of the imagination is “crucial in creating a compassionate society.”²⁷

²⁴ Chris Jenks, editor, *Visual Culture*, London: Routledge, 1995, p.16.

²⁵ This shift, discussed in the introduction, is based partly on the material analysed in this chapter. “Audio-visual culture” is a more inclusive term which acknowledges the importance of studying not only the images, but also the sounds/words linked with a particular audio-visual text. See an alternative view in: M. Warren, *Communications and Cultural Analysis - A Religious View*, Westport, Connecticut: Bergin and Garvey, 1992. Warren argues that: “We now live in an ‘image culture’. With film, television, and print technology allowing the cheap reproduction of multicolour graphics, almost all in the post-industrial West are immersed in images. Society is so much awash in them that the prevalence of images is a dominant characteristic of our time.” p.91. I would still contend that the majority of electronic images are defined or contextualised by words and/or music.

²⁶ This resonates with Clifford Geertz’s often quoted definition of culture. Culture, for Geertz, “denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men [sic] communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life.” Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, p.89. If symbolic communication, as Geertz asserts, is at the heart of our cultural context, then a careful reading of specific audio-visual symbols as carried out in this chapter is an important task.

²⁷ Jones suggests that: “It’s only in the imagination that you are able to enter into the shoes of a people who are dispossessed, marginalised and poor. And if you can’t imagine what it’s like to be out of work or to be in a refugee camp or what it’s like for a mother to try and give suck to a child at a milkless breast, then you won’t do anything about it..... A society where imagination is not developed becomes a cruel and care-less society.” James Jones, Private Recorded Interview with Jolyon Mitchell in Oxford, 15 June, 1997.

This is one reason why the imagination is so important for preachers seeking to learn from radio broadcasters and intent on critically engaging with our audio-visual culture. Walter Brueggemann, describes the imagination as:

.....very simply the human capacity to picture, portray, receive, and practise the world in ways other than it appears to be at first glance when seen through a dominant, habitual, unexamined lens.²⁸

This should not be read as a comprehensive definition of the imagination,²⁹ but this “human capacity” to “picture” and “portray” the world imaginatively can be seen explicitly in the creation of television programmes and films. It will be argued that audio-visual productions have the potential both to limit and to extend the viewers’ capacity “to picture, portray, receive, and practise the world” beyond “dominant, habitual” stereotypes. It is probable, however, that programme makers who rely upon one-dimensional stereotypes might constrict, rather than develop the imaginative capacities of the audience. This significant issue of audience *reception* and *interpretation* of electronic religious stereotypes demands another complete study and will not therefore be considered in detail here. As has been suggested above,

²⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible and Postmodern Imagination - Texts Under Negotiation*, SCM: London, 1993, pp.12-13.

²⁹ Defining the word “imagination” is a complex and problematic task. One analogy may illustrate the sense in which it is used in this thesis: picture the imagination as resembling a control room full of video machines and tape recorders. Each tape plays at a different speed and a different moment. The quality and clarity of the tapes depend on the age and significance of each recording. Each day new video and audio tapes are created, many using extracts from older tapes. This picture of the imagination recognises that it is a *productive* and a *reproductive* tool available to each individual. There is also the potential for the verbal and visual to be drawn together onto tapes in the imagination. This metaphor for the imagination, as an audio-visual control room creating new tapes and drawing upon a library of tapes, is not intended to be a comprehensive definition. Rather it is intended to illustrate the “creative and derivative” potential of the imagination discussed in the previous chapter (Ch.2.3.iv). It is also an imaginative attempt to draw upon the definitions and discussions to be found in the following texts: John MacIntyre, *Faith, Theology and Imagination*. Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1987; W.J. Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith*. Mystic, CT: 23rd Public Press, 1985; James P. Mackey, editor, *Religious Imagination*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1986; G. Robinson and J.Rundell, editors, *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity*, London: Routledge, 1994, especially Ch.6, Paul Ricoeur, “Imagination in Discourse and Action”; and Mary Warnock, *Imagination*. London: Faber and Faber, 1976. Imagination theory has become an important strand within the “New Homiletic”. See, for example, Richard L. Eslinger, *Narrative and Imagination - Preaching the Worlds that Shape Us*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.

stereotypes on screen have the potential either to extend or to constrict audiences' imaginations. They may also provide a valuable window onto programme makers' theological presuppositions. Texts containing stereotypes are therefore worthy of close analysis.

In order to do this, we will now explore how certain scholars have reacted to television's power to create, to reinforce and even to subvert religious stereotypes. It will be argued that there is a need for oral interpreters of audio-visual texts, who will not only break down these stereotypes, but also break open and re-form such portrayals. On the basis of a critical analysis of four recent television portrayals of faith, God and Christ, it will be proposed that religious stereotypes are not only confirmed, but also extended and even challenged by such broadcasts.

This will lead to the contention that these audio-visual texts raise a number of important issues for those seeking to communicate orally and effectively in an audio-visual culture. It will, for example, be suggested that the polysemic nature of many audio-visual texts provide preachers with opportunities to connect with their listeners' imaginations through oral discourse. This will be particularly true for those who believe that oral discourse is at its best when it becomes a co-creative act between speaker and listener.

This introductory section has set out the case for critical engagement with televisual texts in an audio-visual culture. Definitions have been given and a range of reasons have been offered for why preachers, hoping to be heard in a competitive communicative environment, should critically engage with such material. The next step is to consider different ways of approaching or critically engaging with our audio-visual culture.

2. *Interpreting Electronic Stereotypes*

There are many voices endeavouring to describe, analyse and critique our audio-visual culture. A preacher, intent on critical engagement with electronic stereotypes, can usefully listen to the opinions not only of other theologians, but also of communication historians, mass media scholars, sociologists, semioticians and cultural theorists. The voices attempting to decode our “electronic Babel”³⁰ can be categorised as **iconoclasts**, **iconographers** and **interpreters** of our audio-visual culture.³¹

Before moving to discuss specific authors and texts, it is important to underline that certain scholars’ responses to television, an electronic medium, are being described using the pre-electronic terms “iconoclast” and “iconographer”. These terms carry with them a considerable history,³² which reflects a fundamental theological divide in Christianity.³³ There is an implicit suggestion behind linking particular writers about television to these historical categories: it locates them within a long tradition of theological controversy.³⁴

³⁰ This phrase was borrowed from Colin Morris’s, *God-In-A-Box*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984, chapter title 9 was “Electronic Babel - The Zone of Mission”. His preceding chapter, “Ideas in a world of Images”, analyses some of the characteristics of a visual culture.

³¹ Gregor Goethals, *The Electronic Golden Calf, Images, Religion and the Making of Meaning*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley Publications, 1990, see “The Iconofiers” p.152. For further material on “Iconofiers and Iconoclasts” see Goethals’ “Media Mythologies” in *Religion and the Media*, edited by Chris Arthur, Cardiff: University of Wales, 1993, pp. 25-39. I have replaced the Goethal’s term “iconofier” (sometimes spelt by Goethals as “iconifier”) with “iconographer”. This is an adaptation of the commonly used word “iconography”, found in texts on icons, such as Gennadios Limouris, “The Microcosm and Macrocosm of the Icon: Theology, Spirituality and Worship in Colour”, pp. 93-123, and Vladimir Ivanov, “Iconography and Icon”, pp. 149-153, in *Icons - Windows on Eternity*, Geneva: WCC, 1990, compiled by Gennadios Limouris.

³² John Baggeley provides a concise and clear chapter on the historical background of icons, *Doors of Perception - Icons and Their Spiritual Significance*, London: Mowbray, 1987, pp.6-32. See also Gennadios Limouris, compiler, *Icons - Windows on Eternity*, Geneva: WCC, 1990, especially pp.1-52.

³³ This theme will be discussed in greater depth in the final chapter of this thesis.

³⁴ See: “Iconoclastic Movements - Variations on a Theme”, John Dillenberger, *A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities - The Visual Arts and the Church*, London: SCM, 1986, pp.56-74. He argues: “although the iconoclastic impulse, wherever it occurs, has the same characteristics, the setting in which it breaks out may be extremely different. Culturally and theologically, the iconoclastic controversy of the Eastern Orthodox Church [c.725 to 842] has little in common with that of the Reformation period [Northern Europe, 16th Century].” p.61.

On the one hand, there are iconoclasts who “place strong emphasis on the importance of the Word” and are therefore “suspicious of the image”,³⁵ and on the other, there are iconographers who embrace the image as a potential window onto eternity and the transcendent. From the first iconoclastic perspective, television has the potential to create electronic *idols*, whilst from the iconographic viewpoint, it can be a source of electronic *icons*.³⁶

This second and more positive belief in the creative and iconographic power of television raises the fascinating possibility that what John Baggley argues for icons, is also partially true for the electronic icon-creator: television. “In approaching icons we are entering a world where a different language is used: the non-verbal language of visual semantics, the symbolic language of form and colour.”³⁷ At this point in the discussion my contention is twofold: first, that in approaching television “we are entering a world where a different language” is used; secondly, television has the capability to be both an idol and icon. Given both the distinctive “symbolic language” and the strong potential of television, it is vital that it is interpreted critically and appropriately. These are two important points to bear in mind when analysing electronic stereotypes.

i. Iconoclasts

The author of the much cited *Amusing Ourselves to Death*,³⁸ Neil Postman, has been the standard bearer for those who are critical of television’s impact on society,

³⁵ Carlos A. Valle, “Communication and Mission” in *Renewing Communication and Mission*, London: WACC, 1996. Valle contrasts reformed theologians who place strong emphasis on the importance of the Word, with Orthodox theologians who have a more positive view of images, p.10.

³⁶ For an intriguing discussion of idols and icons see: Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being - Hors Texte*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991 (1982). Marion argues that the “decisive moment in the erection of an idol stems not from its fabrication, but from its investment as gazeable.....The gaze alone makes the idol.” p.10. By contrast the icon “summons the gaze to surpass itself by never freezing on a visible” p.18 and so leads us through the “painted visibility” of the “incarnation and the factual visibility of our flesh” to the invisible. p.22. My contention is that in the same way television has the potential to become either an idol or an icon.

³⁷ John Baggley, *Doors of Perception - Icons and Their Spiritual Significance*, London: Mowbray, 1987, p.78.

³⁸ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, New York: Penguin, 1986, first published 1985.

described in this discussion as iconoclasts. Ironically his iconoclastic analysis of a televisual culture is itself extremely entertaining.³⁹ For Postman, television promotes “incoherence and triviality” and “is transforming our culture into one vast arena for show business”.⁴⁰ His thesis has been summed up as the belief that television provides “corrosive amusement”.⁴¹ Behind Postman’s fear of the corrosion or trivialising of politics, education and religion by television, lies a nostalgia for the printed word and the logical, linear world which it upheld.⁴² In Postman’s eyes “television has gradually *become* our culture, the background radiation of the social and intellectual universe”.⁴³

It is interesting to note how Postman balances such contextual arguments with specific criticisms, such as that on television God is:

a vague and subordinate character. Though His name is invoked repeatedly, the concreteness and persistence of the image of the preacher carries the clear message that it is he, not He, who must be worshipped. I do not mean to imply that the preacher wishes it to be so; only that the power of a close-up televised face, in color, makes idolatry a continual hazard. Television is, after all, a form of graven imagery far more alluring than a golden calf.⁴⁴

Postman clearly wishes to shatter that “golden calf”. His primary tool is education, but he himself often falls into the trap of stereotyping television in order to support his own case.⁴⁵

³⁹ Some cynics would argue that Neil Postman has made a living by critiquing our increasingly visual culture with other texts such as *Technopoly*, New York: Vintage, 1992, and his co-authored book with journalist Steve Powers, *How to Read the News*, London: Penguin, 1992.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.80.

⁴¹ Joli Jensen, *Redeeming Modernity - Contradictions in Media Criticism*, Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1990, provides an intelligent critique of Postman’s thesis, pp. 44-50.

⁴² Postman asserts that “on television, discourse is conducted largely through visual imagery, which is to say that television gives us a conversation in images, not words.” Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, London: Penguin, 1986 (1985).

⁴³ *ibid.*, p.79.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 122-3.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, see especially Chapter 7. In this chapter on news Postman fails to recognise sufficiently the more analytical or documentary style of broadcasting that is both entertaining and informative. Instead, he stereotypes television news as a series of unrelated stories which lose their significance because of their juxtapositions.

Another highly critical voice comes from the French sociologist, Jacques Ellul. His views will be discussed in greater detail in the final chapter of this thesis. At this stage it is worth noting that he believes that “the iconoclasts were right. But they were defeated.”⁴⁶ In so far as he is also deeply suspicious of our visual culture, and in particular of television, he represents the European counterpart of Postman.⁴⁷ His justification, however, is more theologically grounded and is most clearly expounded in *The Humiliation of the Word* (1985).⁴⁸ In his eyes it is disastrous for the church to mimic the “technique” of an image based culture and make television programmes. He believes that “by allying ourselves with images, Christianity gains (perhaps) efficacy, but destroys itself, its foundations and its content.”⁴⁹

Malcolm Muggeridge’s *Christ and the Media* (1977) represents a third iconoclastic voice: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word became flesh, not celluloid.....”⁵⁰ Unlike Ellul, Muggeridge focuses the spotlight less on the idea of the word heard and more on the person of Christ encountered. Throughout this vivid book, based on a series of public lectures, Muggeridge contrasts the fantasy created by television with the reality of Christ.

For Muggeridge, part of the inherent danger of a visual culture shaped by television is the potential, at all levels, for it to “draw the people away from reality”.⁵¹ On this basis he believes that television is not simply incompatible with, but also even destructive of, Christianity.⁵² He constructs an imaginary fourth temptation for Christ, a prime time chat show which “would launch him off on a tremendous career as a world-wide evangelist.....”⁵³ Christ rejects this dazzling, and seductive offer.

⁴⁶ Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985, p.106.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.213.

⁴⁸ For a more extensive analysis of Ellul’s position and this text see Chapter 7 section 5 of this thesis.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.203.

⁵⁰ Malcolm Muggeridge, *Christ and the Media*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977. p.88. and for a more extensive analysis of Muggeridge’s positions see: David Winter, *Seeing Through the Eye: Muggeridge, the Prophet of the Media Age*, Dedicatory Address, Wheaton College, 18 Nov. 1995; and Jolyon Mitchell, *New Methods for a New Culture*, Durham: Unpublished Dissertation, 1989.

⁵¹ Malcolm Muggeridge, *Christ and the Media*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977, p.60.

⁵² Jolyon Mitchell, *New Methods for a New Culture*, Durham: Unpublished Dissertation, 1989, p.13ff.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p.37.

He is concerned with reality and not fantasy. This may partially explain Muggeridge's drastic challenge to his readers to do what he did to his own set: "Throw it away!" Behind both Ellul's and Muggeridge's approach lies a belief in the primacy of the written and spoken word. In their eyes a visually dominated culture, represented and formed by television, has the power to undermine the foundations of faith.

This disparaging trio - Postman, Ellul and Muggeridge - are but three representatives of a whole genre of **iconoclastic** scholars who are highly critical of television and of the audio-visual culture it creates. It is important to locate their three critiques within a wider series of critical or iconoclastic texts published in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵⁴

Patrick Brantlinger draws on several of these books to illustrate how "television" is perceived "as the chief culprit in the alleged decline and fall of contemporary culture".⁵⁵ These texts reflect how television, a foundational element of our audio-visual culture, often provokes an antagonistic reaction.⁵⁶ For many of these authors, who are highly critical of television, the "tube" is an "electronic Trojan horse".⁵⁷ The American art historian Gregor Goethals recently argued that "most religious thinkers struggling with media mythologies" have worked more as "iconoclasts than iconofiers".⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Examples of iconoclastic texts written in the 1970s and 1980s include: Wilson Bryan Key, *Subliminal Seduction*, New York: Prentice-Hall, 1973; Gregg Lewis, *Telegarbage*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1977; Mary Lewis Coakley, *Rated X: The Moral Case Against TV*, New Rochelle, New York: Arlington, 1977; Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, New York: Morrow, 1978; Tony Schwartz, *Media: the Second God*, New York: Anchor Books, 1983; Marie Winn, *The Plug in Drug*, New York: Penguin, 1985 (1977); Ian I. Mitroff and Warren Bennis, *The Unreality Industry - The Deliberate Manufacturing of Falsehood and What it is Doing to our Lives*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, first published in 1989.

⁵⁵ Patrick Brantlinger, *Bread and Circuses - Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983. p.19. Brantlinger's fascinating book is based around a critique of what he terms as "negative classicism." This phrase is used to refer to critical theories of mass culture where the "modern world is said to have entered a stage of its history like the decline and fall of the Roman Empire." p.17. He draws on Marie Winn and Jerry Mander (p.253), amongst a wide range of authors, as examples of writers who believe television is "undermining true values, consciousness, society" (p.250) and "causing cultural and political decadence" (p.251).

⁵⁶ Contrast the above iconoclastic texts with work by David Bianculli, *Teletocracy - Taking Television Seriously*, New York: Touchstone, 1992. At the heart of his argument defending television is the belief that "television deserves more respect". He also cites many of the above texts, p.23.

⁵⁷ Quentin Schultze, *Redeeming Television*, Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1992, p.11. Schultze later argues that "the electronic Trojan horse can be transformed into a chariot of grace". p.15.

⁵⁸ Gregor Goethals, "Media Mythologies", in *Religion and the Media*, edited by Chris Arthur, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1993. She believes that the reason for this iconoclastic approach

The iconoclastic approach, both within and outside the Christian tradition, has a number of weaknesses. It ignores the more positive elements inherent in an audio-visual culture, and the importance of the visual within the Christian tradition. It yearns for an imaginary golden age of books and word-based discourse. It oversimplifies the nature of our visual culture, and fails to recognise that the convergence of television, film, video, computers and the telephone is changing the relationship between senders and receivers, and is thereby creating a more interactive setting. Postman, Muggeridge and Ellul, for example, are more concerned with attacking the “idol” of television and shattering the religious stereotypes it creates and reinforces, than with considering how television also has the power to subvert simplistic stereotypes. The way in which television itself may undermine such religious stereotypes will be explored later in this chapter.

ii. Iconographers

The **iconographers** could be described as those who seek not to dispose of the television set, but rather embrace it as practitioners or dance with it as commentators. For example, Ben Armstrong, former Executive Director of National Religious Broadcasters in the USA, sees the “awesome technology of broadcasting” as one of the “major miracles of modern times”. Television and radio have “broken through the walls of tradition” and “restored conditions remarkably similar to the early church”.⁵⁹

Such optimistic understandings of the mass media, and of television in particular, are to be seen in their most extreme form in the work of many American electronic evangelists. They view television and radio as God-given tools which should be used to preach the Gospel to the “ends of the earth”. On this basis many of them have accepted the “values of the world of commercial broadcasting” and concentrated on

is partially because “many denominations have been repulsed by the techniques and messages of the video preachers. Furthermore, the enormous financial costs of contemporary television technology have further inhibited mainline denominations.” p.35.

⁵⁹ Ben Armstrong, *The Electric Church*, Nashville: Nelson, 1979, p.7-9. These references are also to be found in *American Evangelicals and the Mass Media*, Quentin Schultze, editor, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990, p.32.

“producing slick ‘professional’ products for precisely targeted audiences”.⁶⁰ The work of these iconographers, commonly referred to as “TV evangelists” has spawned much academic research.⁶¹ Leonard Sweet memorably argues that: “The study of televangelism is a field of such noise and confusion that one only goes near it with gloves, goggles and defoggers.”⁶²

TV evangelists are but one group within this category of electronic iconographers. Another group uses television, but also retains a critical stance towards it. As a broadcaster Colin Morris embraces the television, but as a Christian scholar he also reflects on its role. In *God-in-a-Box*, for example, he raises the question of how Christianity, a faith with the symbol of a bloody execution at its centre, can translate into the high-tech and carefully ordered world of the television studio.⁶³ Whilst Morris critically reflects on the role of television, his work as head of BBC Television’s Religious Broadcasting, as producer of television documentaries, and as the chair of a short-lived religious quiz show, illustrates how he appears to have been happy to work as an electronic iconographer.⁶⁴ Morris, a regular religious broadcaster, uses one of his television sermons as an opportunity to challenge

⁶⁰ James McDonnell and Frances Trampiets, editors, *Communicating Faith in a Technological Age*, Slough: St. Paul Publications, 1989, p.15.

⁶¹ See: Leonard Sweet, editor, *Communication and Change in American Religious History*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993. Especially Elmer J. O’Brien’s excellent bibliography on “The Modern Electronic Era: 1920 to the Present”, p.452 f. See also: Stewart Hoover and Robert Abelman, editors, *Religious Television: Controversies and Conclusions*, Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1990. Stewart Hoover, *Mass Media Religion - The Social Sources of the Electronic Church*, London: Sage, 1988. Peter Horsfield, *Religious Television - The American Experience*, Longman: New York, 1984.

⁶² Leonard Sweet, editor, *Communication and Change in American Religious History*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993, p. 63.

⁶³ Colin Morris, *God-in-a-Box - Christian Strategy in the Television Age*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984, p.230. “The Gospel of the Cross is the supreme example of non-dominating communication; indeed it is communication by the dominated. The religious broadcaster is, therefore, confronted by an absurdity - trying to proclaim from a position of immense secular power the futility of secular power compared to the divine strength exhibited in utter weakness on the Cross. We are like a millionaire preaching the virtues of poverty from the back seat of a gold-plated Rolls.”

⁶⁴ See: Colin Morris, *Wrestling with an Angel*, Fount: Collins, 1990. An interesting collection of essays, a number reflect his belief that “cinema and television have become the most powerful storytellers of our time.” p.76. (See also p.167 of *Wrestling with an Angel* for same Rolls Royce analogy as used in *God-in-a-Box*.)

“stereotyping”, and in its place creates, almost iconographically, a picture of “our cosmic destiny”.⁶⁵

Thomas Boomershine, an American New Testament scholar, is another example of what I have termed an electronic iconographer. Like Morris, he has written thoughtfully and critically about the role of television in communicating faith.⁶⁶ He has also been one of the central figures behind the American Bible Societies’ project to translate the Gospels into the audio-visual language of MTV.⁶⁷

The work of Morris and Boomershine are two examples from a range of scholars and practitioners who want to go beyond the iconoclasm of the earlier section. They will not reject wholesale televisual technology or forms of discourse. In both their writing and practice they appear to recognise television’s creative potential: it can not only build religious stereotypes, but also subvert them.

This section has identified two contrasting examples of electronic iconographers, the TV evangelists, who were particularly strong in the 1980s, and the scholar-broadcasters who seek to translate their communication into the audio-visual language of television. One reason for reflecting on their work is that both groups have contributed in a small way to the communicative environment in which preachers and broadcasters are now attempting to communicate.

⁶⁵ Colin Morris, *Starting from Scratch*, London: Epworth, 1990. This book was based on two series of broadcast sermons. One for BBC 1 Television and the other for BBC Radio 4 in the spring of 1990. In his talk for television on “The Image of God” he touches on the theme of “stereotyping” which he describes as the “sin of imprisoning people with derogatory images - the very thing Moses condemned..... they are the woman driver, the anti-social Black, the Irish drunk, like museum specimens labelled for ever on the basis of one impression, which if not downright false is bound to be grotesquely over-simplified. Complex personalities robbed of the mysterious, the as-yet-unformed elements in their personalities, turned into graven images.” pp.71-72. Notice the slightly different definition of stereotyping employed by Morris.

⁶⁶ Thomas Boomershine, “A New Paradigm for Interpreting the Bible of Television”, in Tyron Inbody, editor, *Changing Channels - The Church and the Television Revolution*, Dayton, Ohio: Whaleprints, 1990. He asserts: “story is the most natural form for television. That is why I am optimistic about television. Story is the most natural form for the children of Israel throughout the ages..... I am not afraid of the electronic media in the way most people are.” p.60.

⁶⁷ See: Chris Arthur, *Religion and the Media*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993, p.36. For a more detailed discussion of translation see Chapter 7 section 3 of this thesis.

iii. Interpreters

One scholar who has attempted to draw from both the iconoclastic and iconographic responses to television is Gregor Goethals. She resists the temptation to "*Worship At The Video Altar*" or at the feet of "*The Electronic Golden Calf*",⁶⁸ and instead calls for Niebuhr's "permanent revolution of heart and mind". She believes that those who take part in this revolution will be called upon to be "symbol makers and users, as well as symbol destroyers - iconofiers and iconoclasts."⁶⁹ In her eyes, communicators of faith are called both to build up and to knock down.

This is the approach of those who bring together the categories of "iconographers" and "iconoclasts". They could be described as "**interpreters**" of our audio-visual culture, who are neither "seduced" by it, nor entirely dismissive of it.⁷⁰ As interpreters they not only explicate verbal and visual texts, but they also attempt to shatter some of the stereotypes of the age, as well as create new icons appropriate for an audio-visual culture. Preachers, I would suggest, should draw on the tools of "iconographers" and "iconoclasts", and also develop their own distinctive approach as re-formers and renewers of orality.⁷¹ The theoretical methods available to homiletical "interpreters" are almost intimidatingly wide-ranging. To mention but a few, they include Saussure's semiological approach,⁷² John Fiske's readings of

⁶⁸ Gregor Goethals, *The TV Ritual: Worship at the Video Altar*, Boston: Beacon, 1981.

⁶⁹ Gregor Goethals, *The Electronic Golden Calf: Images, Religion and the Making of Meaning*, p.211. There is an inconsistency in her text over the spelling of Iconofiers in a heading (p.152) and Iconifiers in the body of the text (p.211). This text replaces Goethal's term "iconofiers" with "iconographers".

⁷⁰ The interpreter's methodology has resonances with Paul Ricoeur's approach to interpretation, summarised in two phrases: "the hermeneutics of suspicion" and "the hermeneutics of trust".

⁷¹ In practice this means interpreters will both critically analyse and sensitively use a variety of media. Quentin Schultze, for example, persuasively argues that the church must "use a carefully crafted combination of all media forms - oral, print and electronic". The "significance, limits, potential" of these different media need also to be addressed by "religious scholars and educators" Quentin Schultze, "The Place of Television in the Church's Communication", in Tyron Inbody's (editor), *The Church and the Television Revolution*, Dayton, Ohio: Whaleprints, 1990, p.33 and p.38.

⁷² Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966.

popular culture,⁷³ and Denis McQuail's comprehensive analysis of media and culture.⁷⁴

It is interesting to notice that not many authors are attempting to interpret our "audio-visual culture" theologically, nor are there many signs of theologians/homileticians attempting to analyse specific electronic stereotypes. This is worrying, especially if exposure to certain portrayals contributes to the stereotypes of God and faith in audiences' imaginations. Jacques Ellul believes that the growth of "prejudice and mental stereotypes" may be attributed to "the mental reception of images." Even if Ellul is only partially correct that, "stereotypes are ready-made images received as is, from the outside", ⁷⁵ then it is vital that these electronic images should be deconstructed. In other words, they should be critically analysed, and where necessary redefined or even recreated. This is an important task for preachers attempting to communicate orally and effectively today.⁷⁶ To illustrate this interpretative process, we will next provide a critical analysis of several recent "audio-visual texts".

3. Analysing Electronic Stereotypes

As has been argued above, preachers seeking to learn from radio broadcasters cannot ignore the audio-visual context in which they are both attempting to speak. In particular, the language and form of television have contributed to this communicative environment. This is one of many reasons why preachers should seek to "critically demystify" televisual texts.⁷⁷

⁷³ John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, London: Routledge, 1989.

⁷⁴ Denis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory*, (Third Edition), London: Sage, 1994. See "Mass Communication and Culture" (Ch. 2.) and "The Production of Media Culture" (Ch. 8.); and, Denis McQuail, *Media Performance - Mass Communication and the Public Interest*, London: Sage, 1992.

⁷⁵ Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985, p.205.

⁷⁶ It will be discussed in detail in section 4: "Implications for Interpreters" and section 5: "Implications for Oral Communicators" of this chapter.

⁷⁷ Michael Warren, *Communications and Cultural Analysis - A Religious View*, Westport, Connecticut: Bergin and Garvey, 1992, p.68. See also the introduction of this thesis for a more extensive discussion of this important phrase.

In order to illustrate such critical demystification, I will analyse a number of extracts, taken from a variety of programme genres, broadcast over a period of twelve days on British television in 1995.⁷⁸ It is important to re-emphasise that these extracts are but one small sample of our audio-visual culture. For this reason the results of this detailed, but tightly focused, textual analysis must be handled cautiously.⁷⁹ In this discussion a balance between poles of interpretation is called for: we must be critically discerning enough to identify one-dimensional or superficial portrayals, but equally, we should avoid evaluating every religious portrayal we encounter as a stereotype.⁸⁰

i. The Rector's Wife - A Silent God?

The popular TV drama *The Rector's Wife*, based on Joanna Trollope's novel,⁸¹ provokes many questions about faith, sex and relationships. One important early scene is set during a Sunday morning service in the village church. It comprises fifteen shots and lasts one minute and thirty two seconds. The rector's hope for promotion to the archdeacon's job has been thwarted. It is clear from earlier scenes that he is deeply disappointed. He still continues his work as parish priest, but gradually retreats into isolated misery. The first image of this sequence is of a "typical" rural church nestling in sunny English countryside. This is followed by an interior shot: the rector, Peter Bouverie, celebrates communion facing away from the congregation. Secondly, a skilfully placed, high angle, close up shot highlights how

⁷⁸ These extracts were taken from programmes broadcast on national British television during a period of 12 days in late January, 1995. Two dramas, one documentary and one current affairs programme were selected.

⁷⁹ Quentin Schultze argues that: "It is a sad fact that evangelicals complain loudly about the televisual stereotyping of believers while ignoring the way tube glamorizes some of the worst institutional sin of contemporary society." Quentin Schultze, *Redeeming Television*, Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1992, p.132.

⁸⁰ The language of television is not solely based upon secular images. Screen portrayals, from outside main-stream religious broadcasting, often resonate with religious meaning. Unfortunately, some directors, script-writers, and journalists create stereotypical religious images to illustrate their stories. This, however, is not always the case. This section examines a number of extracts which illustrate how one of the main vehicles of our "audio-visual culture", television, can use, adapt and sometimes even subvert stereotypical images of God and faith.

⁸¹ Joanna Trollope, *The Rector's Wife*, London: Bloomsbury, 1991.

he is alone with his God.⁸² The words of institution from the 1662 prayer book are reinforced by strong, atmospheric music and then a wide angle shot. This third shot allows the television audience to sit with members of the small congregation and see in the distance: a priest cordoned off by an altar rail, static kneeling choir boys in the chancel, and sunlight streaming through the window.

This typical parish scene is reinforced by the fourth, fifth and sixth shots. These are head and shoulder images of kneeling congregation members praying. A tight close up of the rector's wife's face is then juxtaposed with a tracking shot which begins on the back of her husband as he continues to celebrate communion and then tracks up a brightly illuminated stained-glassed window image of Christ on the cross.

Another close up on Anna Bouverie, the rector's wife, highlights how she appears to be in deep thought, if not prayer. She does not speak aloud, but her voice is laid over the music. The audience has access to her private prayers. They come in the form of a plaintive question.⁸³ These words cut through the apparent normality of the church service. Behind her unspoken thoughts lies the belief that the thwarting of her husband's hopes is not fair. This sentiment is highlighted by some tight editing and sensitive sound dubbing. Memorable images are combined with simple statements to create a powerful scene, which acts as a pivotal moment in the narrative structure of the plot.⁸⁴ Following this scene, even though no angry words are spoken, the rector, Peter Bouverie, becomes increasingly distanced from his wife. Atmospheric music is played under the whole sequence and adds poignancy to Peter's disappointment, and Anna's frustration.

⁸² Keith Selby and Ron Cowdrey, *How to Study Television*, London: Macmillan Press, 1995, provides a number of useful insights into how to "analyse a media text", and in particular how to study TV.

⁸³ One group of New College theological students felt this questioning echoed the questions of the Psalms.

⁸⁴ For an example of a homiletician who draws on television narrative structure see: Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980. See also Chapter 1 section 3 iii. of this thesis.

Close-up shot on rector's wife's face,

Anna: "He's spent.....

Head and shoulders close-up

on stained glass window Christ,

his whole life serving you.....

Return to close up shot on rector's wife,

eyes moving upward,

Why didn't you help him? "

Tight close up on Christ's face,

[five seconds hold]. ⁸⁵

That it is Christ she is addressing is made clear by careful editing between images of her face and the stained glass window image of Christ himself. Interestingly, Christ is portrayed as having long golden-blond hair and beard, with matching golden-blue eyes. This is a distant, emotionless, and singularly European Christ. There is, unsurprisingly, no response from this figure to her plea. Here is a silent figure and by implication a silent and remote Christ.

This instance can also be viewed as a standard device often used by television and film directors to make it unambiguous to whom the actor is speaking, whilst praying. In this case, it was important to make it clear that the rector's wife was not asking herself a rhetorical question, but speaking to God. On one level, this highlights the problem faced by all directors attempting to portray prayer: How can a conversation with an invisible deity be visually represented? In this scene from *The Rector's Wife* prayer has been transformed into an inwardly articulated monologue with a visible image. It certainly makes for more understandable viewing, even if it fails to provoke the viewer's imagination.

On another level, it demonstrates how images of Christ can easily become stereotypical. In this instance, the long golden-blond haired figure, silent in stained-

⁸⁵ *The Rector's Wife*, Channel 4, 19 Jan 1995, television drama based on Joanna Trollope's book.

glass, represents Christ. In another context the sociologist, Richard Dyer, argues that one of the roles of “stereotypes is to make visible the invisible”.⁸⁶ This is the case in this example, as the invisible focus of her prayers is made visible by the stereotypical image on the stained glass window. This image provided the most explicit image of Christ in *The Rector's Wife*. In this scene, prayer is portrayed as a monologue with a non-responsive deity.

A comparison of this memorable scene as originally written by Joanna Trollope and then reinterpreted for television is intriguing. In the novel, *The Rector's Wife*,⁸⁷ Anna's silent questioning is framed by thirteen pages of assorted memories of her life with Peter. Her first complaint, near the start of the first chapter, is to God, and focuses on Peter's failure to gain promotion:

What a thing to do, Anna accused God, what a thing to do to someone who serves You. God said nothing. He held Himself aloof.⁸⁸

Her second outburst, near the end of the second chapter, is directed to herself rather than to God:

...it is not fair that he should never know what he cannot do, that he should always set himself targets he can't achieve, that he should never be allowed to progress.⁸⁹

Notice how the television version has compressed, simplified, edited and perhaps even distorted the original text. Two extended thoughts have been brought together in twelve powerful words. “He's spent his whole life serving you. Why didn't you help him? ” The translation from a word driven narrative to an image based story has also

⁸⁶ Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations*, London: Routledge, 1993, p.16. see especially Chapter 3, “The role of Stereotypes”.

⁸⁷ Trollope has written eight novels since 1987, two deal explicitly with Church related matters. One is the *The Rector's Wife* and the other is *The Choir*. As a recent Oxford University Preacher Trollope spoke on “The Christian Author”. She explored the importance of truthful portrayals and asserted that she did not believe that the overt, “in your face”, path is the most effective way of communicating religious truth. Joanna Trollope, “The Christian Author”, at the University Church of St. Mary the Virgin, 4 May 1997.

⁸⁸ Joanna Trollope, *The Rector's Wife*, London: Bloomsbury, 1991, p.24.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p.37.

reshaped the impact of this scene. The introduction of the stereotypical image of Christ has both heightened the impact of the monologue and underlined the inactivity of God.

ii. Signs and Wonders - A Blond Haired God?

God was once again portrayed as a non-responsive deity in another recent big-budget drama, *Signs and Wonders*.⁹⁰ The vicar, Reverend Timothy Palmore, shouts at another image of Christ. This powerful moment is when he is on his own, in his church, looking up at a crucifix. He cries for help, and as in the *Rector's Wife* there is no immediate response. This is a common scenario. A man faces trauma, and cries in his distress looking at Christ on the crucifix.⁹¹ This example illustrates how audio-visual media are often forced to rely upon a stereotypical symbol or pictorial representation of Christ as a substitute for relying on the viewer's imagination. The imaginative act has taken place in the director's or screen writer's mind's eye, before being introduced into the actual screenplay.

A pivotal moment in *Signs and Wonders* relies on a more active portrayal of Christ. In this scene, David Warner, playing the liberal vicar, is in hospital. He has taken a painful route to his hospital bed. He lost his daughter Claire (Jodhi May) to a Californian Cult, lost his son to deconstructionism, lost his parishioners to his "loony curate" who got "old time religion and a brass band", lost his faith, and lost his wife Elizabeth (Prunella Scales), who goes off to California on a rescue mission. He finally loses his temper, gets drunk, thumps his curate at a healing meeting and suddenly suffers from a stroke. He is rushed off in an ambulance.

⁹⁰ *Signs & Wonders*, BBC 2, 16 Jan 1995, written by Michael Eaton and produced by Michael Wearing.

⁹¹ Compare, for example, the film *Priest*. This reflects the crisis of faith provoked by a Catholic priest's confrontation of his own homosexuality. In a moment which goes even further than the crucifix scene in *Signs and Wonders*, he stares at Christ on the crucifix, crying at the same time: "Do something! Don't just stand there. You smug eyed little bastard. I know you'd speak out. I can't take on 2,000 years of history. I look around for an example and all I see is you." *Priest*, director, Antonia Bird, UK, 1994. This portrait of Liverpool life and faith, written by Jimmy McGovern, was on release during the 12 day period from which these audio-visual texts were selected. It therefore represents another element of the communicative environment.

In hospital he has a vision. Prior to this vision he struggles out of his bed onto the floor, he wets his pyjamas and then looks up. He sees a bright light through the open fire-escape door. A man dressed in white, like a male nurse, is bathed in light. This figure stands in the doorway, and then in slow motion walks smiling towards the vicar who is helpless and transfixed on the floor. Powerful music combined with haunting plainsong makes it clear to the viewers that this is no ordinary male orderly. This point is reinforced as he opens out his hands. They are marked with the stigmata, his forehead is marked with scratches in the shape of a crown of thorns. In warm reassuring tone he speaks: "It's all right Timothy, I'm here now. I always have been. I'm looking out for you." Significantly, as he helps Timothy back into bed, it is made clear for an observant audience that the thorn marks on his forehead have vanished.

This audio-visual text can be interpreted in a number of different ways. First, it could be taken at face value. This is a vision of Christ or a Christ-like figure, who interrupts the vicar's trauma, and brings peace. Secondly, it could be seen as an hallucination of a sick man in a hospital. The vanishing of the marks on the male nurse's forehead perhaps hint at the director's or screen writer's perception. This is merely a nurse who helps, but was perceived as something much more by this sick vicar.

Both interpretations are defensible on the basis of what is seen. It reflects the inherent ambiguity or polysemic nature of this portrayal. In other words, this moment could be interpreted as an actual epiphany or as an insight into the over-developed imagination of a traumatised cleric. It might even be legitimately seen as both. The fact that the actor playing the nurse also had blue eyes and blond hair makes an intriguing comparison with the stained-glass window Christ in *The Rector's Wife*. Notice how both images of Christ reflect certain Western stereotypical pictures of Jesus as meek, mild and Caucasian.

A more radical interpretation of this hospital scene, might draw upon Jürgen Moltmann's approach in *The Crucified God*.⁹² He proposes a "theology of the cross

⁹² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, London: SCM, 1974.

which understands God as the suffering God".⁹³ On this basis God may be found more realistically in the suffering patient than in the faultless blue eyed and blond haired nurse. Such an approach has the power to shatter the stereotypes and provide an intriguing corrective to a domesticated vision of Christ.

In *Signs and Wonders* this "showing" is a pivotal moment for the vicar's character development. He appears to rediscover his faith and his passion to be involved. This is manifested in a self-discharge from the hospital to go to the scene of a pit accident. He wants to be alongside the miners' families as they wait for news of their trapped loved ones. The result of this act of solidarity, combined with a successful rescue, is a full church for a service of thanksgiving. This provides the setting for one of the most powerful and provocative scenes in the series.

The vicar, himself trapped in a wheelchair, slurs out a sermon. The controlling metaphor is: "That which was lost has now been found." Towards the end of this address one of the miners gets up to leave. An argument in front of the congregation ensues. It raises in short sharp terms the issue of theodicy:

Miner: Look it weren't God who pulled them men out of pit. Unless it was him who trapped them in the first place. I mean what would you be saying if your daughter wasn't coming home or if we'd all been killed last night.

Vicar: [Speech slurred] Then we would have been in need for someone to transept [meaning transcend] our grief.

Miner: You're a good man vicar. But all this, [looks around church] all this is a load of bollocks! [Exit]⁹⁴

⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 227. See also Moltmann's frequently quoted citation of Elie Wiesel's book *Night* where a youth dies a long and painful death on the gallows at Auschwitz. "Where is God now?" cries a prisoner. Wiesel, an Auschwitz survivor, echoes the question and replies: "He is here. He is hanging there on the gallows....." pp.273-274.

⁹⁴ *Signs & Wonders*, BBC 2, 16 January 1995, written by Michael Eaton and produced by Michael Wearing.

This example illustrates how *Signs and Wonders* breaks free of certain stereotypes. Faith and doubt confront each other in uncompromising terms. It also qualifies the central point in a strongly worded review by John Naughton of *The Observer*. He argued that the problem with television drama is that it “has a relatively low concept-to-action ratio. Trying to insert Big Ideas into a four-part thriller is like stuffing a large parcel into an overcoat pocket: it spoils the hang of the garment.”⁹⁵ On the basis of the last scene cited it appears that even if “Big Ideas” often sit uneasily in television drama, at least “Big Questions” can be raised through this media.

Stereotypes can be a barrier to this questioning process. If shattered by programme makers, or inverted by interpreters they can become, however, a catalyst for facing the reality of a suffering world. In the light of provocative scenes such as the *Signs and Wonders* argument in the church, it is difficult to hold unquestionably onto belief in a God who remains distant, like a figure in a stained glass window.

The vulnerable, hard to hear, wheel-chair bound vicar is a peculiarly strong figure in this scene. His strength is derived less from his outward appearance, more from his experience of suffering. His own participation in pain adds weight to his negligible figure with his stuttering words. In short, this goes beyond the stereotypical figures of a golden-blue eyed and golden-blond haired Christ, and provides a parallel to the image of a “crucified God” who has participated in a suffering world.

It has been argued in this section that *Signs and Wonders* can be viewed as an example of an audio-visual text which at times goes beyond simplistic stereotypes. The stereotypical picture of the English parish priest serving tea and cucumber sandwiches on the lawn has been replaced by a vicar who doubts, is vulnerable and may even appeal to audience sympathy. I would contend, therefore, that such a portrayal has subverted at least one stereotype.

⁹⁵ John Naughton, “Faith, hope and irony”, in *The Observer*, Sunday 12 February 1995, p.25.

iii. *Crusades: A Violent God?*

The examples cited from *The Rector's Wife* and *Signs and Wonders* represent explicit portrayals of Christ. The following two programmes to be analysed, *Crusades* and *Correspondent*, provide more implicit images of God. Once again, however, these images often subtly reinforce stereotypes and in so doing construct a highly selective view of God and of his followers.

Responsibility for much suffering in the Middle-East is often rightly laid at the feet of Christian crusaders who turned "the cross upside down" to use it as a sword.⁹⁶ It is now over 900 years since Pope Urban II preached his historic sermon in a field at Clermont, launching the first crusade.⁹⁷ A range of "commemorative" documentaries marked the 900th anniversary. One of the most extensive was presented by the former Monty Python star Terry Jones. His idiosyncratic approach ensured that the series *Crusades* occasionally challenged stereotypes, but often relied upon them. One significant short quotation perhaps sums up the underlying interpretative philosophy of the series. It came in the second programme, where Terry Jones quoted a translation of the blind Syrian poet, Abu'l-'Ala al-Maarri, who had died in the 1050s:

The Jews, the Muslims and the Christians,
They all got it wrong.
The people of the world only divide into two kinds:
One sort with brains who hold no religion.
The other with religion and no brain.⁹⁸

This point was reinforced by the images and stories which followed this citation. Meat being cooked on a spit was used to illustrate how this atheist poet's village would fifty years later suffer at the hands of cannibalistic crusaders. The point that

⁹⁶ Phrase borrowed from a sermon by Richard Holloway, Bishop of Edinburgh, 1990.

⁹⁷ Jonathan Riley-Smith, editor, *The Atlas of the Crusades*, London: Times Books, 1991, "The charismatic preaching of Pope Urban II inspired tens of thousands of people from all walks of life to join the First Crusade. Pope Urban II proclaimed the First Crusade at the Council of Clermont on 27 November 1095, calling on western knights to liberate Jerusalem." p.28.

⁹⁸ David Wallace and Alan Ereira, producers, *Crusades* BBC 1, 10 January 1995, written by Terry Jones and Alan Ereira.

those with “religion”, and especially the Christian crusaders, had “no brain” and “no heart” was implicitly developed in this series.

Stereotypical views of believers were also forcefully reinforced by a more dramatic juxtaposition of words and images, which were used to illustrate the capture of Jerusalem on July 15th 1099. Terry Jones’ script powerfully illustrates the brutality demonstrated by the crusaders as they broke into Jerusalem:

The new children of Israel slaughtered everyone they found. They set fire to the great Synagogue where Jews gathered and burnt them alive. Tancred smashed into the Dome of the Rock and looted it. It was Friday. Thousands of Muslims were gathered at the temple mount. They fled into the El Aqsa Mosque. In return for a huge ransom Tancred guaranteed their safety. The next day they were all slaughtered. It was here that the blood was said to run so deep it came up to the ankles of the knights.⁹⁹

This commentary is preceded by a ten second montage. Narrow alleyways and pensive looking Arabic faces are cut together. The sound of running feet is combined with shots by a hand-held camera being moved at speed through the alleyways. This crescendo of images and sounds create an atmosphere of impending danger. Gruesome pictures of spears and swords driven into bodies are drawn from ancient documents to show how “the new children of Israel slaughtered everyone they found.”

A circling helicopter shot of the golden-domed mosque is then used to illustrate the location of Tancred’s betrayal. This aerial shot of Jerusalem is followed by another traditional portrayal of the crusaders in Jerusalem. A static picture is given movement both by the camera which scans from left to right and by the reading of crusader Raymond of Aguilers’ eyewitness account. The tragic mood is enhanced by haunting plainsong in the background and the reader’s triumphalistic intonation:

What an apt punishment! The very place that had endured for so long the blasphemies against God, was now masked in the blood of

⁹⁹ Terry Jones, presenter, *Crusades*, BBC 1, 17 January 1995, see previous note for further details. See also Jonathan Riley-Smith, editor, *The Atlas of the Crusades*, London: Times Books, 1991, p.30.

blasphemers..... Once the city had been captured, it was most rewarding to see the devotion of the pilgrims before the Holy Sepulchre; how they clapped in exultation singing a new song to the Lord.¹⁰⁰

A thirty second pause in the commentary follows. It is filled provocatively by pictures of modern day pilgrims at the church of the Holy Sepulchre. Their eyes are shut, some hands are raised, and they are singing in tongues. Terry Jones briefly removes the mask of constructing a historical documentary and comments:

Jerusalem has an overwhelming power. These pilgrims who had arrived at the place of the crucifixion while we were filming began singing in tongues. And the crusaders too felt deep and powerful emotions. But while they sang, bodies of their victims were being stacked outside the walls. They had cleansed the holy places with human sacrifice.¹⁰¹

The move from 1099 to the 1990s is subtle but makes a powerful point. The juxtaposition of the images of bloodthirsty crusaders with contemporary pilgrims creates some problematic connections. This sequence does not explicitly imply that these believers have “no brain”, it does, however, subtly suggest that they stand in the line of those moved deeply by the “power of Jerusalem”. Following on immediately after the crusading atrocities it is hard not to make a link between past cruelty and present piety. In other words it takes little imagination to infer from this sequence that religion in whatever cultural context can lead to deluded acts.

Behind this stereotyping is a major problem faced by any historical documentary makers. How do you televise an age which has no footage to draw upon? In this case the editing together of these two scenes appears to add to stereotypical perceptions of faith. Whilst there is no explicit mention of God, it is possible to see how such coverage of today’s believers can also add to the stereotyped images of a violent deity who inspires murder or delusion.

¹⁰⁰ Terry Jones, presenter, *Crusades*, BBC 1, 17 January 1995, see n.98 for further details.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

iv. Correspondent - An Absent God ?

This theme of belief as delusion is also to be found in an extract from BBC News and Current Affairs. Unlike *Crusades* which suffered from too few contemporary pictures, BBC 2's *Correspondent* has a whole world of images to choose from. This is television's adaptation of Radio 4's popular *From Our Own Correspondent*. It is comprised of reports from foreign correspondents around the globe. During the period under consideration the central European correspondent Matt Frei dispatched a highly personal view of the Pope's tour of the Far East and Australia.

In the Philippines he was clearly surprised by the Pope's fitness and the size of the crowds he drew. He had expected to be covering the "faltering progress of an ailing" Pontiff:

But this turned out to be a triumphant cavalcade. John Paul the Second was in his element. The ageing actor was playing to his biggest audience yet. Transformed into drama critics we were disarmed by the turn out. The climax was much more than a mass. It was the Vatican's version of Woodstock with the Pope as superstar. He needed the adoring crowds as much as they needed him. An opium for the masses and for the Pope.¹⁰²

The choice of language used here is illuminating. Many words resonate with theatrical connotations. An "ageing actor playing to his biggest audience yet" is the most obvious metaphor. This allusion is balanced by the journalists being transformed into "drama critics". The images of vast crowds at an open air mass, combined with the tight confines of the press bus highlight that Matt Frei is a spectator rather than participant at this event.

The Pope is caricatured not only as "ageing actor", but also as a pop star idol from the Vatican. The clichéd adaptation of Marx merely underlines how this report has created a stereotypical image of the religious leader as no more than a performer. God

¹⁰² *Correspondent*, BBC 2, 28 January 1995, reporter : Matt Frei.

is entirely absent from the script. He has been replaced by a drug relied on by both the people and the Pope.

v. Case Study Conclusions

On the basis of the four selected extracts it would be possible to construct a series of images of God: as a **drug** for the people (*Correspondent*), as a **projection** which sometimes provokes violence (*Crusades*), as a **delusion** or **dream** which colours hallucinations (*Signs and Wonders*) and as a **fiction** which leads to talking to stained-glass windows (*The Rector's Wife*). These stereotypical portrayals of God derive some of their strength from the fact they contain a "kernel of truth".¹⁰³ Religion, and Christianity in particular, can act: as a drug, numbing users to the pain of living with loss; as a projection, allowing believers to escape from taking responsibility for their actions; as a delusion, providing dreamers an escape from everyday realities; and as a fiction, creating a world where everybody lives happily ever after if they have enough faith.

This sequence of interpretations could be used to support the case of media **iconoclasts** amongst the theologians. "If these are fruits of our audio-visual culture then they appear merely to reinforce religious stereotypes and undermine the reality of faith. On the evidence of these four audio-visual texts we should go ahead and discard our television sets!" This imaginary articulation may be caricatured, but it does reflect aspects of Postman's, Ellul's and Muggeridge's reservations about television.

A less sceptical reading of these audio-visual texts could provoke an **iconographer** to more constructive imaginings of God. Here is someone who meets us in our weakness (*Signs and Wonders*), disturbs our ambitions (*The Rector's Wife*), speaks

¹⁰³ Myra Macdonald, *Representing Women - Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media*, London: Edward Arnold, 1995, p.13 and see also Tessa Perkins, "Rethinking Stereotypes", in M. Barret, M. Corrigan, et al, *Ideology and Cultural Production*, London: Croom Helm, 1979, pp. 135-59.

words of peace in a city once bathed in blood (*Crusades*) and has the power through his representatives to draw a crowd of over four million (*Correspondent*).

These two imagined responses of the **iconoclasts** and the **iconographers** have serious limitations. They highlight that the way in which these audio-visual texts are interpreted will to some extent depend upon the **viewer's context** and the presuppositions which they bring with them to their viewing.¹⁰⁴ Eldridge *et al* persuasively argue that:

Researchers cannot accurately predict how audiences will relate to and interpret a particular cultural product simply by analysing.... camera angles, lighting, sound track and scripts..... In other words people are not blank slates who approach a film [or TV programme] without any pre-existing identity, experience, or resources. They come to the cinema (or TV set) with sets of prior opinions, views, and ideas of themselves.¹⁰⁵

Inevitably, the imaginings of the programme makers themselves have coloured the construction of these extracts,¹⁰⁶ but determination of meaning also depends "on how the texts are received by their audience".¹⁰⁷ In communication theory terms, not only the encoder's background, but also the decoder's experience,¹⁰⁸ will influence

¹⁰⁴ Roger Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life*, London: Routledge, 1994, see especially "On the Audience", pp. 132-158. He argues that television audiences "live in different overlapping but not always overdetermining spaces and times: domestic spaces; national spaces; broadcasting and narrowcasting spaces; biographical times; daily times; scheduled, spontaneous but also socio-geological times....." p.132.

¹⁰⁵ John Eldridge, Jenny Kitzinger and Kevin Williams, *The Mass Media and Power in Modern Britain*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p.130.

¹⁰⁶ Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese, *Mediating the Message, Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content*, London: Longman, 1991, provide a series of useful approaches to the question "What factors inside and outside media organisations affect media content?" p.1. See also "Influences on Content from Individual Media Workers", pp. 53-84.

¹⁰⁷ Denis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory*, Third Edition, London: Sage, 1994, p.262.

¹⁰⁸ See: Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding" in S.Hall, D.Hobson, A.Lowe and P.Willis, editors, *Culture, Media, Language*, London: Hutchinson, 1980. For a helpful summary of Stuart Hall's ground-breaking work on "dominant", "negotiated" and "oppositional" readings/interpretations of audio-visual texts, see also: John Eldridge, Jenny Kitzinger and Kevin Williams, *The Mass Media and Power in Modern Britain*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp.130-133.

the interpretation and meaning given to these texts in a range of "interpretative communities".¹⁰⁹

4. *Implications for Interpreters*

For preachers working from within the community of theological **interpreters** these audio-visual texts provoke a number of responses. First, electronic religious stereotypes should be uncovered, rigorously critiqued and re-formed.¹¹⁰ Secondly, they should not be ignored, as they can usefully highlight the idiosyncrasies and follies of the faithful. Thirdly, they should also be considered outside the narrative structure and content of individual programmes.

i. *Uncovering Electronic Stereotypes*

One of the leading Mass Communication theorists, Denis McQuail, argues persuasively that "the main task of content analysis should be to uncover" critically the way in which "mass media content embodies the inequalities of society, especially in respect of *class, gender, dominant ideologies, commercialism* and other forms of exploitation."¹¹¹ One of the "dominant ideologies" within the British mass media appears to be a highly sceptical attitude towards God and faith. Matt Frei's report on the Asian Papal visit is a good example of how, in many media circles, a secular reading of faith has become a given. This scepticism is a symptom of the increasingly secularised context within which journalists, producers, and editors operate.¹¹² The result of such scepticism is often the construction or reinforcing of stereotypes.

¹⁰⁹ Denis McQuail and Sven Windahl, *Communication Models - For the Study of Mass Communication*, Second Edition, New York: Longman, 1993, see their discussion of Stuart Hall's model on encoding / decoding, pp. 146-147.

¹¹⁰ Such critiquing of stereotyping is also highlighted in certain media texts such as Denis McQuail, *Media Performance, Mass Communication and the Public Interest*, London: Sage, 1992. He argues that "the stereotype may be used for economy or ease of communication, but its use always carries risks of loss of neutrality and can have a biasing effect," p.234.

¹¹¹ Denis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory*, Third Edition, London: Sage, 1994, p.262.

¹¹² "The word 'secularisation' - or at least the word 'secular' - still dominates our understanding of the religious condition of modern society." David Lyon, *The Steeple's Shadow*, London: SPCK, 1985, p.1. The nuances and definitions within the secularisation debate are rarely reflected by journalists and producers working to simplify and interpret an increasingly pluralistic and secularised context. For

Stereotypes, both implicit and explicit, of Christ, God, and faith identified in *The Rector's Wife*, *Signs and Wonders*, *Crusades*, and *Correspondent* contribute to the sceptical attitudes in our audio-visual culture. They do this by adding to the considerable range of stereotypical portrayals both of faith and of the focal points of belief. One of the roles of the theological interpreter of the electronic media is to name aspects of "the domination system" and so "engage with the powers" which influence what is played on the screens of our imaginations.¹¹³ The simple act of identifying or naming electronic stereotypes will uncover their role in broadcasts. This will have the effect of undermining or at least contesting the power of a "dominant" reading of such audio-visual texts.

ii. *Transforming Electronic Stereotypes*

Preachers, acting as theological interpreters, should go beyond merely naming and uncovering the stereotypes. They should aim to transform these electronic portrayals. As has been argued earlier this will mean working both as an iconoclast and iconographer, and going further to develop skills as a transformer or re-former of religious stereotypes. The interpreter's role includes not only identifying the dominant reading of these texts, but also offering alternative readings so that some people may experience within our audio-visual culture what Peter Berger has described as "ruptures in reality". In his words:

The ordinary world, previously perceived as massive and cohesive, is now seen as being tenuously put together, like a stage set made of cardboard, full of holes, easily collapsed into unreality. Furthermore, behind the newly revealed holes in the fabric of this world appears *another reality*.¹¹⁴

useful discussions of the British context see Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945 - Believing Without Belonging*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994, and Steve Bruce, *Religion in Modern Britain*, Oxford: OUP, 1995. For a general overview of the secularisation debate to 1985 see David Lyon's book cited above, and David Martin's classic, *A General Theory of Secularization*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1978.

¹¹³ Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers, Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992. Wink skilfully identifies the "myth of redemptive violence in popular culture today," p.17, and later argues for the "unmasking of the domination system it reinforces," pp. 87-104.

¹¹⁴ Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative - Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*, London: Collins, 1980, first published by Doubleday, 1979, see pp. 36-41, especially p.40.

If the apparently “massive and cohesive” world of television is perceived with Daniel Boorstin as a “thicket of unreality”,¹¹⁵ then stereotypical portrayals should be challenged. But, this does not mean kicking the cameras over as in the film *Jesus of Montreal* nor attacking the screen with a base-ball bat as in *To Die For*.¹¹⁶ On the contrary it does mean an interpretative approach which offers alternative readings of what Mitroff and Bennis have described as *The Unreality Industry*.¹¹⁷ This could be seen as an act of subversion which enables viewers to stand “outside the mundane world” which is reinforced by television, and see it as it really is: “flawed, absurd or even illusionary.”¹¹⁸ The detailed analysis of the audio-visual texts in section two was an attempt to uncover electronic stereotypes, and then lay the foundations for alternative readings.

iii. Contextualising Electronic Stereotypes

It has been argued that preachers, working in an audio-visual culture as theological interpreters, need both to uncover and to transform electronic stereotypes. It is also important for interpreters to contextualise electronic stereotypes. This means, first, locating the extract within the programme structure, secondly, identifying where it in fits within the daily schedule, and thirdly, placing it within the overall seasonal output. This third aspect of contextualising serves as a useful reminder that a twelve day period from later in the year would have produced different results. For example, television dramas such as *The Vicar of Dibley* (BBC 1), *Ballykissangel* (BBC 1), and *Father Ted* (Channel 4) would have probably furnished contrasting, more comic portrayals of God and the faithful.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo Events in America*, New York: Atheneum, 1972. See also Joli Jensen, *Redeeming Modernity - Contradictions in Media Criticism*, London: Sage, 1990, for a critique of Boorstin.

¹¹⁶ Denys Arcand, dir., *Jesus of Montreal*, film, 1989, and Gus Van Sant, dir., *To Die For*, film, 1995.

¹¹⁷ Ian I. Mitroff and Warren Bennis, *The Unreality Industry*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, first published in 1989.

¹¹⁸ Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative - Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*, London: Collins, 1980, first published by Doubleday, 1979, p.39.

¹¹⁹ By contrast, a study of religious portrayals in recent Soap Operas would provide further evidence of negative stereotyping. “Faith has not fared well in *EastEnders*: the new fundamentalist on the block is Alistair, yet another creepy Christian, hypocritical enough to rival the scary cult leader

In contextualising electronic stereotypes, it is also necessary to locate them in the wider communicative environment and employ a theological methodology which searches for “signals of transcendence”. Hoekstra and Verbeek argue:

The audiovisual media and culture can work as a site and source for religious inspiration and imagination, for morality and spirituality.¹²⁰

Alongside the stereotypical images of *The Rector's Wife* were a range of highly evocative portrayals. For example, the increasing distance between the rector and his wife, her growing independence and self-discovery, her intense relationships with her two children and her responses to the intensely irritating parishioners all cast light and shadows onto real human experiences, emotions and moral dilemmas. Apart from the church scene discussed in some detail earlier it is hard to identify further obvious examples of *The Rector's Wife* as the “site and source for religious inspiration and imagination.” Unless one interprets the breakdown of their marriage as a general theological lesson to all religious professionals, this series lacked explicit symbols or resources for alternative or subversive imaginings of God in an audio-visual culture.

Signs and Wonders provides more fertile ground as a “site and source for religious inspiration and imagination”. It is filled with provocative religious imagery: burning crosses, visions of the devil, and cult members chanting creeds. These are contrasted with often empty churches and full revival meetings. Similarly, *Crusades*, encourages the viewer to step back into the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries, through recreated images of besieged castles, pious and brutal crusaders, sophisticated and faithful Moslems.

On one level, these images from *Signs and Wonders*, *The Rector's Wife*, and *Crusades* could be seen merely to reinforce stereotypes. On another level, they

Simon who took over Brookside Close for a while.” [Consider also the chain-smoking, and highly prejudiced Dot Cotton from the late 1980s *Eastenders*.] See: “The Tabloid”, in *The Independent*, 3 April 1997, p.2.

¹²⁰ Henk Hoekstra and Marjeet Verbeek, “Possibilities of Audiovisual Narrative for Moral Formation”, in *Mass Media and the Moral Imagination*, edited by Philip J. Rossi and Paul A. Soukup, Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1994, p.233.

illustrate that what Berger writes about modernity may also be true for certain television dramas: "Modernity pluralizes both institutions and plausibility structures".¹²¹ For example, *Signs and Wonders*, with its diverse selection of religious portrayals may contribute to a more pluralistic and relativistic imagining of God. They also, however, provide images by which to qualify or even counter some of the religious stereotypes highlighted in this chapter.

Berger also draws a contrast between the pre-modern situation which was a world of "religious certainty" and the modern situation which is characterised by "religious uncertainty". This "*creates a new situation in which picking and choosing becomes an imperative.*"¹²² This resonates interestingly with a more recent analysis outlined by the Old Testament theologian cited earlier, Walter Brueggemann, who believes that we are now operating in a "new interpretative situation".¹²³ Interpreters attempting to contextualise audio-visual texts under their scrutiny would do well to acknowledge this "new interpretative situation", and recognise that it may also require them to adapt their own hermeneutical tools.

Another element of this "new interpretative situation" is the range of electronic religious images available to choose from by the viewing public. In a moment they are able to "zap", with the help of a video recorder, from computer recreated images of eleventh century Cluny (*Crusades*), via graphic pictures of genocide in Rwanda (*Correspondent*) to a scene of passionate embraces in a church house (*The Rector's Wife*). With the development of cable and satellite, the choice of audio-visual stimuli, for those with the technology, has already become endless.

This "anarchy of images" and stereotypes, expressed by a huge variety of sacred and secular images, may have further contributed to what Berger describes as our

¹²¹ Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative - Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*, London: Collins, 1980 (1979), p.17.

¹²² *ibid.*, p.28, original author's italics.

¹²³ Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible and Postmodern Imagination, Texts Under Negotiation*, SCM: London, 1993, p. vii. and p.8.

“religious uncertainty”.¹²⁴ This increase in choice also highlights the importance of interpreters contextualising the audio-visual texts they scrutinise. This in turn will facilitate their attempts to uncover and transform electronic stereotypes.

5. Conclusion - Implications for Oral Communicators

It has been argued in the previous section that interpreters of audio-visual texts need to develop skills in uncovering, transforming and contextualising electronic stereotypes. This fits in with an emerging theme of this chapter, which has been that electronic religious stereotypes need to be deconstructed.

I would like to underline at this point in the discussion that preachers should take on the role of critically interpreting such electronic portrayals. This is a view which finds some support from the experienced radio broadcaster and preacher, Donald English. He argues:

The task of the pulpit becomes a witness to the reality of transcendence in the midst, which will broaden life and our perception of it..... In such a context the preacher becomes more than an observer. The role now involves the preacher being *an interpreter*. From the pulpit people should expect not only to hear what the preacher, and those whom the preacher quotes have seen and experienced, with an indication of their meaning. They need also to have identified that which they themselves are experiencing, with the necessary help to interpret it.¹²⁵

There is an urgent need for preachers to act as interpreters, or perhaps more accurately provide their listeners with the motivation and skills to become their own interpreters. Preachers should neither immediately reject all electronic religious portrayals (as do many of the iconoclasts), nor revere all electronic religious images (as do some of the iconographers). Instead, they should be prepared both to build on and to break open electronic stereotypes, using the tools of both iconoclasts and

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, p.28.

¹²⁵ Donald English, *An Evangelical Theology of Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996, pp.20-21.

iconographers. Myra Macdonald implies that stereotypes can reduce the “three-dimensional quality of the real to a one-dimensional and distorted form.”¹²⁶

Preachers who engage critically with such audio-visual texts may be able to add depth to the one-dimensional form of electronic religious stereotypes, and so re-form these images.

This act will include orally uncovering, contextualising and transforming not only electronic stereotypes, but also some of the multitude of today’s media stories and images. English asserts:

The media age ensures that the context for everyone of us is in the whole wide world. Our congregations bring with them the news they have seen on television or heard on radio or read in the newspaper.¹²⁷

This is a significant point. Note how English emphasises the global context which he believes we all share. Consider also how he highlights the communicative environment which listeners inhabit.

This returns us to a foundational question: How can preachers operate successfully in our rapidly evolving communicative environment? Whilst this is a problematic issue, it need not be viewed as an entirely impossible task, especially if we recall Walter Brueggemann’s understanding of the imagination as: “the human capacity to picture, portray, receive, and practise the world in ways *other* than it appears to be at first glance when seen through a dominant, habitual, unexamined lens.”¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Myra Macdonald, *Representing Women - Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media*, London: Edward Arnold, 1995, p.13. A stereotype can also become an “ideal type”, in other words a simplification of reality, which is then used as a tool to interpret reality.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, pp.21-22. English continues with two incisive questions relating to the preacher acting as interpreter: “Is the transcendent in the midst there, also? If so, how do we make our witness on that larger stage?”

¹²⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible and Postmodern Imagination - Texts Under Negotiation*, SCM: London, 1993, pp.12-13. (*Italics mine.*)

The challenge for the preacher, acting as an interpreter and working only with oral media, is to learn how to build on and even to create pictures, but to avoid generating or reinforcing stereotypes, such as those identified above. This will mean operating counter culturally: attempting to form images and stories not with electronic media, but with words. Or, to put it more graphically, to act as an imaginative “word artist” in an audio-visual culture.¹²⁹ James Jones, the Bishop of Hull, sees himself as an oral interpreter of our audio-visual culture, who acts as a verbal “iconographer”, “impressionist” and “photographer” depending on the subject matter and the speaking situation.¹³⁰ As a regular preacher and radio broadcaster James Jones often creates recognisable but surprising scenes. For example, his description of a visit to a night-club with “pounding music that invaded your body through the feet more than the ears” shatters stereotypical views of how bishops spend their Friday nights.¹³¹

Another example is provided by the Preacher of the Year in 1995, Reverend Barry Overend, who briefly referred in his prize winning sermon to the familiar and evocative pointing finger in the national lottery advertisement. He imaginatively transformed the image to illustrate his theme of God’s love. First, he replaced the pointing finger with a “beckoning hand”, and secondly, to the phrase: “It could be you!” he added “It shall be you.”¹³² Notice how he develops the image and extends the discourse. Such an approach recognises, with Brueggemann, that the “preacher is

¹²⁹ Rabbi Lionel Blue, Unpublished Private Recorded Interview with Jolyon Mitchell in Edinburgh, 31 October, 1995. He saw himself as a “word artist” who delights in creating pictures with words. For a fuller discussion of Blue’s work see Chapter 5 of this thesis.

¹³⁰ Jones emphasises the importance of iconic language and also hypothesises: “I would have thought that when you’re talking about God in images you are being impressionistic. When you are describing situations in which people find themselves you’re being more like a photographer.” James Jones, Private Recorded Interview with Jolyon Mitchell in Oxford, 15 June, 1997.

¹³¹ James Jones, *Thought for the Day*, Radio 4, 24 February 1997. He goes on vividly to describe the “strobe lighting” which “seemed to hold the gyrating, air-beating dancers in an experience of religious intensity. But the ecstatic look in their eyes vanished as they left the club into the cold dark night - their faces gaunt and empty. It was as if they’d left their souls behind on the dance floor.”

¹³² Broadcast on *Morning Worship*, Radio 4, 5 November, 1995. See: Barry Overend, “The Pure in Heart” in Ruth Gledhill, editor, *The Times Best Sermons of 1996*, London: Cassell, 1996. Overend declared: “For people of varying traditions, seeing God has always been regarded as the end of our searching. The ultimate reward. It is the spiritual equivalent of winning the jackpot, though this time that finger pointing down through the cloud that we’ve all seen on the lottery adverts is more of a hand, beckoning. And the caption suggesting ‘It could be you’ has become the proclamation ‘It shall be you.’” See also: *The Church Times*, 10 November 1995, p.11.

not the only one seeking to provide new material for my imagination, for I am addressed by "legion" in diverse and odd ways."¹³³ These "diverse" and "odd" ways may include audio-visual stories of brutal and pious crusaders (*Crusades*), faithless clerics and lost daughters (*Signs and Wonders*), broken families (*The Rector's Wife*) and adoring crowds (*Correspondent*). These stories draw on a "legion" of scenes. Oral communicators could draw on, adapt and challenge such portrayals.¹³⁴

Stereotypical electronic images of faith and Christ, such as those highlighted earlier in the discussion, should be identified, built upon, or even recreated. What Brueggemann describes as "the offer of new models, images and pictures,"¹³⁵ of Christ and faith via the electronic media is, however, fraught with difficulties. How for example, can an invisible God be portrayed through a medium which relies on pictures? How can a weak, vulnerable and crucified Christ be proclaimed "from a position of immense secular power"?¹³⁶ On the basis of the four case studies in this chapter, it would appear that at least some producers and journalists avoid these questions and resort instead to stereotypical images. This tendency should encourage those preachers seeking to work as interpreters to resort to both verbal iconography and verbal iconoclasm.

It has been argued then that preachers, acting as interpreters, need to both break down and build upon current electronic religious stereotypes. One way of doing this is to offer alternative images, formed verbally, which allow the listener to co-create the scene, and so become more actively involved in the communication process than if they were to receive the more complete audio-visual scene presented to them via the television.

¹³³ Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible and Postmodern Imagination, Texts Under Negotiation*, SCM: London, 1993, p.23.

¹³⁴ This process of drawing on and adapting such portrayals would be especially valuable if Brueggemann is correct when he asserts that "people in fact change by the offer of new models, images, and pictures that characteristically have the particularity of narrative to carry them." p.24.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p.24.

¹³⁶ Colin Morris, *God-in-a-Box - Christian Strategy in the Television Age*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984, p.230.

For those working as oral communicators, including homiletics and radio broadcasters, other difficulties arise. Most of the models, images and stereotypes which resonate today, originate not in biblical narratives, but rather in the electronic media. The picture of the young boy, for example, grinning and staring into the face of an armed but smiling British soldier in Northern Ireland was used around the world to represent the extraordinary new peace.¹³⁷ It caught the mood and the moment. For both oral and visual communicators, this picture offered the opportunity to explore the dividends of peace and the power of reconciliation. In the wake of the images of burnt out London buses and devastated dockland office blocks early in 1996, this image of peace takes on a new meaning, that of hopes dashed.

This example of the fluidity in the perceived meaning of images, also extends to stereotypes. The shift in meaning has relevance for interpreters seeking to communicate images not of a distant stained glass figure, but of a Galilean story teller who delighted in both building upon and breaking open stereotypes. Many of the Lukan parables, for example, subvert the original meaning of the stereotype.¹³⁸ It was a Samaritan outcast, not a member of the religious elite, who helped an injured Jewish traveller.¹³⁹ It was a tax collector, not a diligent religious observant, who went home justified after a visit to the temple.¹⁴⁰ It was the outsiders, the Samaritans, and the tax

¹³⁷ Martin Wright, photographer and director of news photo agency Pagemaker, took this photo on Springfield Road in Belfast. The headline to accompany it in *The Sun* was simple: "West Belfast, 12.15pm, August 31st, 1994." See *Pagemaker*, 14 March 1995, ITV, written and produced by Jeff Anderson, directed by John O'Regan for Granada.

¹³⁸ See: Amos Wilder, *Jesus' Parables and the War of Myths, Essays on Imagination in the Scripture*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982. "In the parables, we have action images. But these are only one kind of metaphor - extended metaphor. Jesus' communication, just because it is fresh and dynamic, is necessarily plastic. Now we know that a true metaphor or symbol is more than a sign, it is the bearer of the reality to which it refers. The hearer not only learns about that reality, he participates in it. Here lie the power..... Jesus' speech had the character, not of instruction and ideas, but of compelling imagination, of spell, of mythical shock and transformation." p.83.

¹³⁹ See: Luke 10:25-37. There is a vast bibliography connected with this parable. (See John Nolland, *Luke, 9v21-18v34*, Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1993, pp.586-8.) Tom Wright's recent discussion in his extensive *Jesus and the Victory of God*, London: SPCK, 1996, is particularly relevant to my discussion. He argues that the "revolutionary" discovery this story points towards is that "the Jew in the ditch discovered that the Samaritan was his neighbour." p.307.

¹⁴⁰ See: Luke 18:9-14. For an excellent general discussion about "Preaching on the parables of Jesus", see chapter of that title in Thomas Long, *Preaching and the Literary forms of the Bible*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989, pp.87-106. See also, Jolyon Mitchell, "Preaching Parables in a Media Age", in *The College of Preachers Fellowship Paper, No. 104*, forthcoming, 1997.

collectors who were given places at the banquet and the leading roles in these stories. Ironically, in some circles today the “Good Samaritan” type figure has himself become a stereotype character, who also needs to be redefined and even subverted.

In each case, the outsider’s role in the story would have probably surprised original listeners. The reason was simple: the Samaritan and tax collector characters violated their conventional roles. In short, they were transformed from flat stereotypes into three-dimensional figures. This process of surprise and subversion provides a useful model for preachers seeking to become modern interpreters of both contemporary electronic parables and biblical parables.¹⁴¹

It has been argued in this chapter that in this media-dominated communicative environment there is a need for interpreters who will critically engage with audio-visual texts. This is an approach which partially draws upon aspects of two contrasting methodologies: iconoclasm and iconography.¹⁴² An interpretative approach was used to analyse four audio-visual texts. This analysis demonstrated how at least one strand of our audio-visual culture sometimes creates and sometimes subverts stereotypical portrayals of God, Christ and faith.¹⁴³ On the basis of these case studies it was argued that interpreters should develop the skills for uncovering, transforming and contextualising such electronic stereotypes. It was then argued that preachers should take on this important role of interpretation. As they seek to create alternative readings of audio-visual texts, the fact that they only have *words* to engage

¹⁴¹ See: J.I.H. McDonald, “The View from the Ditch – and other Angles. Interpreting the Parable of the Good Samaritan” in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 49.1.1996, pp.21-37. “The genius of parable is that it can open up new perspectives, create alternative worlds and thus subvert the conventional, worldly order, Parable unveils and subverts the reality of “closedness”..... When moral and religious symbols are opened anew in a given situation, then signals of transcendence are received, even in the secular world: and the deeply human in us all recognises their truth.” pp.35-37. In this chapter I have attempted to demonstrate how certain audio-visual parables can be “opened anew” in specific situations, and thereby communicate “signals of transcendence”.

¹⁴² The temptation of identifying electronic stereotypes with idols has been resisted, though there are some intriguing connections. For example, compare the satirical description of an idol, “an image profitable for nothing”, in Isaiah 44: 9-20 with the definition of stereotype offered earlier in this chapter.

¹⁴³ It was also illustrated how texts could be polysemically interpreted, in other words, deconstructed in contrasting ways. This may also be an advantage for preachers who wish to adapt, break-open or subvert what many would perceive as electronic stereotypes.

the imagination of their listeners may be an advantage since they can involve listeners more actively in the communication process.¹⁴⁴

This chapter has deliberately shifted the focus away from an explicit consideration of either radio or homiletics. It has focused on televisual portrayals in order to underline that preaching and radio broadcasting do not take place in a communicative vacuum. Because of this fact, the tasks facing oral communicators are different in a televisual age. This assertion will be considered in the following chapter, where the discussion returns to radio. More specifically it focuses on religious radio in what could be described as a pre-television age.

¹⁴⁴ James Jones strongly supports this position arguing: "There is a tendency in an audio-visual culture to devalue words because of the evidence [that] the recall of the visual is greater than the recall of the spoken word. This can be misconstrued as saying that the word is no longer an effective means of communication. And I dispute that, because what radio shows, and the response of the radio audience, is that words are immensely powerful in creating community." James Jones, Private Recorded Interview with Jolyon Mitchell in Oxford, 15 June, 1997.

Chapter 4. **Lessons from the Past: The Radio Padre and C.S. Lewis**

In the first three chapters of this thesis a number of related arguments have been set out. It was argued in the opening chapter that homileticians have responded in a variety of ways to the challenge of communicating orally and effectively in an audio-visual culture. Whilst many have drawn upon the language of television and film, almost all have entirely ignored radio. It was argued in the second chapter that preachers have much to learn from the theory and the practice of radio broadcasting. For example, it was suggested that Ed Murrow's ability as a wartime reporter to create pictures with words, has lessons for preachers aiming to connect with their listeners today. One important strand of the argument in the third chapter was the suggestion that this skill, of creating pictures with words, remains a useful tool for preachers seeking to engage critically with some of the audio-visual stimuli which compete for their congregations' attention. In particular, it was concluded that the use of pictorial language may assist preachers as they attempt to act as interpreters, breaking open or building upon electronic televisual stereotypes. In addressing the question of how to communicate orally and effectively today, the first part of this dissertation has therefore concentrated upon three fields of enquiry: preaching, radio and aspects of our audio-visual culture.

The next three chapters, the second part of this dissertation, will build upon these discussions, and attempt to explore in greater detail what insights might be gained from the work of selected religious radio broadcasters. In this fourth chapter, it will be argued that even radio broadcasters from the 1940s, a pre-television age, have significant lessons for preachers today. Their work will also be used briefly in the following chapter to illustrate some of the ways in which broadcast discourse has adapted over the last fifty years.¹ The question of how to communicate orally and effectively in an environment where audio-visual stimuli compete for the listener's attention remains at the heart of the discussion.

¹ It is important for preachers to note how broadcast discourse has developed over the last fifty years. This in turn has transformed listener expectations about what they will hear. Contrast these developments with certain preaching styles which have not adapted to a rapidly evolving communicative environment.

1. Introduction

This fourth chapter will discuss the broadcasts made by two leading word-artists during the Second World War. Ronald Selby Wright and Clive Staples Lewis were extremely popular, and were both broadcasting at the same time as Richard Dimbleby and Edward Murrow.² Like Dimbleby and Murrow they also provide a useful exemplification of the power of pictorial language.

R.S. Wright was commonly known as the "Radio Padre" and C.S. Lewis was occasionally referred to as the "Radio Academic". They make a fascinating contrast. The former was a down-to-earth Church of Scotland padre, who was "seconded by the army to become the BBC's Radio Padre in April 1942".³ The latter, was an Oxford don whose radio talks would later be published, with a few amendments, as the best-selling *Mere Christianity*.⁴ Both broadcasters would become household names, and build up considerable followings. Such was their popularity that both had their radio talks published. Their broadcasting styles, and in particular their use of conversational and pictorial language, are intriguing.

2. The Radio Padre - Ronald Selby Wright

The Radio Padre is recognised all over the country as easily the finest thing religious broadcasting has ever done for us..... here is a man who really knows the people he is talking to; he knows their lives and really understands their difficulties.⁵

This section will focus particularly on three aspects of Wright's broadcasting. First, it will be argued that Wright's conversational approach encouraged a sense of intimacy between himself and his listeners (Section i). Secondly, it will be asserted that his ability for creating pictorial discourse was partially based upon his skill of observing,

² See Chapter 2 section 3.v. of this thesis for a discussion of Murrow and Dimbleby.

³ Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the UK, Volume III, War of Words*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p.564, footnote 124.

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Glasgow: Fount, Collins Paperbacks, 1977 (1952).

⁵ Professor A.C.F. Beales in *The Universe*, cited by Ronald S. Wright in his autobiography, *Another Home*, Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1980, pp.49-50.

and then describing in pictorial terms, the world he saw on his extensive travels, mostly within Great Britain (Section ii, iii, and iv). Thirdly, it will be suggested that his adeptness with pictorial language extended to his capacity for drawing upon verbal images from the work of others for his own particular use (Section v).

i. Intimate with Seven Million?

Ronald Selby Wright, ordained in the Church of Scotland,⁶ was seconded from an Edinburgh Army Unit⁷ to the BBC at the partial instigation of the Head of Religious Broadcasting, Reverend Dr James W. Welch.⁸ Wright's weekly fifteen minute radio broadcasts began on April 1st, 1942,⁹ though he had previously given four talks in November, 1941.¹⁰ Whilst C.S. Lewis, according to *Time* magazine, had an average audience of 600,000,¹¹ Wright would eventually attract around 7 million listeners every Wednesday.¹² "His talks continued into 1944 and became increasingly popular in broadcast and printed form."¹³ These talks became "as much a wartime institution

⁶ He became Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1972.

⁷ Wright was assigned to 7/9th Royal Scots, attached to the 8th Battalion.

⁸ Reverend Dr. James Welch, was Head of Religious Broadcasting for the BBC from 1939-1947. It is fair to argue that not only Wright, but also Lewis, owe their broadcasting opportunities to James Welch. C.S. Lewis's and R.S. Wright's broadcasts should not be considered separately from the BBC's religious broadcasting policy of the time. This was significantly shaped by Welch. He argued passionately in *The Listener*: "Religious broadcasting is, remember, an extension of the Church, its primary task is to supplement and strengthen the Church's work and try to do what the Churches cannot do. We are all partners." J.W. Welch, "A Day of Challenge", in *The Listener*, Thursday, 8 January, 1942, Volume XXVII, no.678, p.53. From this statement it may be inferred that Welch regarded broadcasters such as Wright and Lewis as partners in the Church's work.

⁹ *ibid.*, p.69.

¹⁰ K.M. Wolfe, *The Churches and the British Broadcasting Corporation, 1922-1956*. London: SCM, 1984, p.279. (Hereafter referred to as Kenneth Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC 1922-1956*, 1984.)

¹¹ "Don v. Devil", *Time*, 8th September, 1947, p.65. See also the front cover for a memorable image of Lewis in the foreground and a devil-like figure in the background.

¹² Kenneth Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC 1922-1956*, 1984. *Let's Ask the Padre* "were sufficiently well received by the Corporation and the Chaplain General to encourage his secondment for six months beginning in February 1942." p.278. Wright claimed that: "The numbers went up to about ten million according to Melville Dinwiddie [head of Scottish Religious Broadcasting] and the average was about seven million." R.S. Wright interview by member of Imperial War Museum Staff, transcript with Rev. David G. Coulter and Imperial War Museum. p.4.

¹³ Kenneth Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC 1922-1956*, 1984, p.280. See also: Ronald Selby Wright, *The Average Man - Broadcast Addresses by the Radio Padre*, London: Longmans, 1942, and *Greater Victory - Further Broadcast Talks*, London: Longmans, 1943. (Hereafter referred to as R. Selby Wright, *The Average Man*, 1942, and R. Selby Wright, *Greater Victory*, 1943.)

as Tommy Handley's *It's That Man Again*'.¹⁴ He did one talk a week and by his own reckoning did "over seventy of these fifteen minute talks".¹⁵

These "direct and simple if somewhat patronising talks" were not, however, without their critics. W.E. Williams, one of the writers for "Critic on the Hearth" in *The Listener*, was initially, in late 1941, highly critical.¹⁶ By mid 1942, however, he would be more positive and was "impressed" by "the tactics" of one of Wright's talks. In Williams' opinion this was "a matter which too many wireless speakers fail to study". On one occasion, he also applauded the way in which the "Radio Padre wisely delayed his exhortation until he had provided a homely analysis of the state of being "browned-off".¹⁷ Given Williams' earlier critique of the Radio Padre,¹⁸ this is a surprisingly positive review. A more significant point, besides this single example of a critic tempered by Wright's "tactics", was that according to Wright himself he received between 100 to 1000 letters a **day** in response to his broadcasts. On this basis alone, assuming the general accuracy of these figures, it is fair to deduce that the Radio Padre made a considerable impact.¹⁹ In order to identify some of the lessons to be drawn from Wright's broadcasting for homileticians it is important to understand some of the reasons for his success.

A number of factors contributed to Wright's popularity and effectiveness as a broadcaster. First, Wright travelled extensively, as he was "anxious not to lose

¹⁴ M.R.D. Foot and J.M. Langley, *M19*, London: Bodley Head, 1979, p.115.

¹⁵ R.S. Wright Imperial War Museum interview, transcript with D.G. Coulter, p.3. Wright also participated in morning prayers, *Lift Up Your Hearts* and even took part in the variety show: *Ack Ack Beer Beer*, p.1.

¹⁶ Kenneth Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC 1922-1956*, 1984, p.279.

¹⁷ W.E. Williams, "The Padre Again" in "Critic on the Hearth - Weekly Comments on BBC. Programmes by Independent Critics", in *The Listener*, Vol. XXVII, 7th May 1942, p.695. Williams' comments concluded with advice to include "fewer anecdotes", take "10 minutes instead of 20" and "temper" his voice with a "less reverberating note". For Wright's talk see R.S. Wright, *The Average Man*, 1942, p.44.

¹⁸ W.E. Williams, in "Critic on the Hearth - Weekly Comments on BBC Programmes by Independent Critics", in *The Listener*, Vol. XXVI, 11th December 1942, p.800.

¹⁹ Ronald S. Wright, *Another Home*, Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1980, p.109.

touch”²⁰ with his soldier audience, so he visited soldiers stationed at “lonely posts dotted all over the country.”²¹ He claims:

I slept in more beds than Mary Queen of Scots ever slept in. I was travelling by trains, buses and everything else. I never stopped travelling. The result was that I got to the most remote places, up in the Highlands and down Devonshire and Somerset. They all welcomed me because they all listened.²²

His self-confessed aim was to “meet as many of the men as I could.”²³ He “met troops living in lonely valleys, and moors, in Highland glens, on islands or round our coasts.”²⁴ He heard many of the questions and concerns of ordinary soldiers, who had had limited contact with the Christianity and the church. For example, during his trip to Cornwall and Devon in July 1942 he records in his diary how he was asked many questions about:

Conscientious objectors, the teaching of Jesus and the war, hypocrites in the Church, compulsory religion and [the] rest. [He observes that] There is no lack of interest in religion, no lack of criticism of the Church and no lack of keenness for the real Gospel.²⁵

Hearing the concerns of his listeners at first hand informed his work as a broadcaster. Alongside this personal pastoral role was Wright’s task every week to “talk to them over the air, taking the place in some sort of way of their own padres.”²⁶ The

²⁰ Kenneth Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC 1922-1956*, 1984, p.278.

²¹ Ronald S. Wright, *Another Home*, Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1980, p.47.

²² R.S. Wright, interviewed by Rev. David G. Coulter, 28th October, 1993, at Queens House, Edinburgh, second tape, p.11 of transcript. See David Coulter, *The Church of Scotland Chaplains in the Second World War*. Edinburgh: Unpublished PhD Thesis Edinburgh University, 1997, and see especially, Chapter 6: “Alternative War-Time Ministries”.

²³ *ibid.*, p.47.

²⁴ R.S. Wright, *The Radio Padre, 1941-1943, Report*, Unpublished Document from BBC Archives, Caversham, Talks File/G, from RCONT/1B 1943-49. In this report he describes what Dr Welch, Head of Religious Broadcasting, wanted him to do: “He wanted me, with the Army’s permission, to get around as many of those, at that time very many, lonely posts dotted all over the country and meet as many of the men as I could and every week talk to them over the air, taking the place in some sort of a way of their own Padres.” Report dated as 30/11/43.

²⁵ R.S. Wright, *Personal Journal/Diary*, National Library, Edinburgh: Unpublished, 9th July, 1942, p.191, typed version p.63. These questions were from troops in an anti-tank regiment and a battalion of the East Surreys.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.47.

combination of extensive travel and regular broadcasting was an “exceedingly exhausting assignment”.²⁷ Nevertheless, leaving the studio to enter into the world of his listeners inevitably nourished his broadcasts.

Over forty years later the radio broadcasting consultant, Robert McLeish, would forcibly advise:

It is a positive duty for the broadcaster to escape from the confines of his [sic] building into the world which is both the source and target for all his enterprise.²⁸

Wright needed no such advice, as he took this “duty” extremely seriously and regularly escaped the confines of his broadcasting bases in Bedford and London.²⁹ This literal travelling into his listeners’ worlds may partially explain his popularity.

A second reason for his attracting such a large audience was his broadcasting manner. “He was friendly and pleasant to listen to,” according to radio producer Ronald Falconer, “the listener felt he was speaking directly and personally to him.”³⁰ This evaluation is echoed in the BBC radio documentary on his life:

Ronald Selby Wright was a consummate professional when he got into a radio studio. In an era when many of the best known voices on the radio treated the microphone like a public meeting. He grasped intuitively that it could be used to say intimate things in a very personal way.³¹

²⁷ Kenneth Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC 1922-1956*, 1984, p.278.

²⁸ Robert McLeish, *The Technique of Radio Production - A Manual for Broadcasters*, Second Edition, London and Boston: Focal Press, 1988, p.160. This advice could be adapted for preachers. “It is the positive duty for preachers to escape from the confines of their church into the world....”

²⁹ Wright admits that: “almost every railway carriage contains at least one sermon”. R.S. Wright, *Personal Journal/Diary*, National Library, Edinburgh: Unpublished, 1942, p.34, 10th April.

³⁰ Ronald Falconer, *Message, Media and Mission*, The Baird Lectures 1975, Edinburgh: The St. Andrew Press, 1977, p.79. Falconer argues that one of the wartime developments in radio was the “direct and personal communication of the radio talk”.

³¹ Johnston McKay, producer, *The Radio Padre*, BBC Radio 4, Remembrance Sunday, 1993, presented by Stewart Lamont. The commentary continues with a significant observation: “his [Wright’s] distinctive style which sometimes rendered him virtually inaudible as a preacher was ideally suited for the wireless.” This remark correctly highlights how different styles of speech may suit radio broadcasting or preaching. Preachers seeking to learn from radio broadcasting should bear in mind that radio is an intimate medium of communication, where projecting to “fill the hall” is not necessary or appropriate.

Wright's own understanding of why his radio talks were so popular provides further support for Falconer's evaluation. Wright admits:

I think really because I'm not a deep theologian. I like people and talk to people and I just talked to them, I didn't preach to them. I just chatted to them. In fact the very first time I did the Radio Padre, Dr Welch, [who] was head of Religious Broadcasting, put a coat at one side of my table and said "Now there is somebody over there. You are talking to that person" and as a result I didn't shout, I just chatted to somebody, who was there. This is how it comes across so much better. Very often when people broadcast they pontificate, they shout, they try to reach the chap at the back of the stalls. That is no use. You've got to talk to a person listening just beside you on the radio, they are not away in the distance. I just talked to the people as though they were beside me.³²

It is clear from this extended statement that Wright, with the help of Welch, grasped one of the fundamental characteristics of radio: the perceived proximity of the speaker for the listener. This insight ensured that he tried to speak in a natural and conversational fashion. In Wright's eyes this intimate discourse, where one is just chatting to one's listeners, is the "splendid secret of the whole business".³³ He believed that "what one was doing was just talking to somebody sitting round the fire beside me. They were more like fireside talks."³⁴

A letter cited in his unpublished personal diary provides some evidence of the natural, conversational form of his first radio talk on 1st April 1942. One John McVie described how members of the Edinburgh Mess of Wright's former regiment were seated at Dinner at 9.25pm about to listen to the new Commanding Officer, when in an adjoining room:

then came that marvellous voice of yours and it was so real and natural that you might have been speaking to us from that little central table instead of from a studio down South.³⁵

³² R.S. Wright, Imperial War Museum Interview with R.S. Wright, transcript with D.G. Coulter, p.4.

³³ R.S. Wright, interviewed by Rev. David G. Coulter, 28th October, 1993, at Queens House, Edinburgh, second tape, p.10 of transcript.

³⁴ R.S. Wright, Imperial War Museum Interview with R.S. Wright, transcript with D.G. Coulter, p.4.

³⁵ R.S. Wright, unpublished personal diary, p.27, referring to 1st April 1942.

Even taking into consideration the fact that Wright was already known by this listener, the emphasis upon the “real and natural” quality of Wright’s discourse is significant. Wright himself believes that he wasn’t modelling on anybody in particular, but simply being himself and “talking naturally”.³⁶

This sense of speaking naturally, personally and directly to his listeners can also be seen in many of his introductions. For example, when setting out his talk on fidelity he begins by creating a feeling of intimacy:

I think we know each other well enough and understand each other well enough now for me to speak out pretty strongly about it.³⁷

He is attempting to create a sense of “mediated” friendship between his listeners and himself. The reality is that he knows few of his seven million listeners and few know him as anything more than a disembodied voice. In short, they “know” him, not in the “flesh”, but as a broadcaster “well enough” not to be surprised if he is frank or straight-forward in his talks. This fictional or illusory intimacy is at the heart of much successful mass communication, and may further explain Wright’s popularity.

As has already been suggested, the evidence provided by his full to over-flowing post-bag underlines his ability to create broadcasts which connected with many in his audience.³⁸ Precisely how he was able to “connect”, and perhaps even develop a feeling of intimacy, with so many of his listeners is worthy of further analysis. This is an important task for homileticians who seek to learn from radio broadcasters, particularly because many homileticians now attach considerable importance to the preacher establishing a trusting connection with listeners.³⁹

³⁶ R.S. Wright, Imperial War Museum Interview with R.S. Wright, transcript with D.G. Coulter, p.5. “I think I was just myself. I wasn’t modelling on anybody, simply talking actually as I am talking to you just now. I just would be talking to somebody sitting on another chair over there and that’s all that happened really and I still do it with schools. I still preach at schools quite a bit and I can talk to them the same way. I find that’s what people seem to like. They just want you to be natural, talk naturally.” Notice how Wright claims to use a similar speaking style for broadcasting and preaching.

³⁷ Ronald Selby Wright, *The Average Man*, 1942, pp.38-39.

³⁸ Ronald Selby Wright, *Another Home*, Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1980, see p.109 for postbag reference.

³⁹ See, for example, Ronald J. Allen, *The Teaching Sermon*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995. Allen provides a useful discussion of what generates trust between preachers and congregations. pp.39-41.

ii. Engaging Images

In the previous section it was argued that **one** of the ways in which Wright attempted to connect with his listeners, develop a sense of “mediated” intimacy and demonstrate that he “really knew” the people to whom he was talking, was through his conversational style of discourse. This form of broadcasting was strengthened by travelling and meeting some of his listeners. Another way in which he attempted to connect with his listeners was through his choice of engaging verbal images. This section will analyse selected examples of how he used pictorial language in his “weekly informal “round the fireside” broadcasts”.⁴⁰ This may provide further clues for the reason for his success.

Wright might be more accurately described as the “roving radio padre”, who often used what he saw on his travels to bring colour to his talks. In one talk, aptly entitled “The Message Must Get Through”,⁴¹ he tells a memorable story about when he was “tramping over our own Border hills with some Scottish soldiers.” Notice how his vivid descriptive language adds to his account:

We’d been on the hills for some days, marching, sleeping in the heather with nothing but the sky above us;[we] came to a lonely valley lost in the midst of these green hills near Lauderdale, where we stopped and rested. I went up to a lonely cottage on the side of the hill to get some water. The old woman came to the door to give me what I wanted, and then seeing the fellows below in the valley, she looked up at me and said. “This is the second time only that the King’s men have ever been in this valley.”⁴²

⁴⁰ Ronald Selby Wright, *The Average Man*, 1942. See the Introduction of this text, where Wright also describes how his weekly informal broadcasts were “to the Forces, and more than the forces”.

⁴¹ This talk was based on a sermon preached at St. Giles’ Cathedral at the first parade and dedication of the colours of the Civil Defence Messenger Service, and was “later broadcast to the Empire”.

⁴² Ronald Selby Wright, *Let’s Ask the Padre - Some Broadcast Talks*, Second Edition, London and Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1943, p.82. He continues, by making a theological connection: “as I went down to join them again, and I remembered. I remembered how not two thousand years ago a small company of young men, most of them in their early twenties, had started the movement that has changed the face of the world.” This needs to be heard aloud to be understood. Notice how he repeats “remembered” and thereby interrupts his own discourse.

The specific details add power to this narrative. For example, “sleeping in the heather with nothing but the sky above us” is an easy image to recreate, especially for the thousands of soldiers who were regularly sleeping outside. Or notice the repetition of “lonely” in consecutive sentences. The placing of “lonely valley lost in the midst of these green hills” and “lonely cottage on the side of the hill” adds to an emerging picture of isolation. It is important to recognise, however, that visual detail is but one of the tools skilfully used by Wright. Short sentences, active verbs, and intriguing dialogue all contribute to the force of the story. In other words, pictorial language does not operate as the only device for using words effectively to create a scene.

This can be seen later in the same talk, with an image which makes for a strong contrast with his earlier picture of the Border hills:

I walked again last week in London through row after row, street after street of ruined, battered houses. I passed the great Church of St. Paul’s standing majestically amid a mile of ruins.⁴³

Active verbs such as “walked” or “passed”, rhythmic repetitions such as “row after row”, and developing parallelism such as “street after street”, all combine to create a picture of an embattled London, where St. Paul’s remains “standing” defiantly surrounded by destruction. This is on a far grander scale than Ed Murrow’s London blitz report, discussed earlier, which focused on a “dripping peach can”.⁴⁴ It lacks Murrow’s observation of minute detail, but compensates with the powerful image of St. Paul’s “standing majestically”. Wright’s description of blitz-torn London is another example of how pictorial language can create a memorable scene, which would have had the potential to touch the listeners’ imaginations, especially for those who knew London or who were living through the Blitz.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p.83.

⁴⁴ See Chapter 2 section 3.v. of this thesis.

iii. *Homely Images*

Wright's skill in engaging his listeners' attention was partially founded upon his ability to step into their shoes, and articulate their experience. For example, in "Cairo Calling", a talk which evolved from his short tour of the Middle East forces in 1943 and 1944 he evokes the atmosphere of home with a few simple word pictures:

It's folk at home, and home itself, that makes up life; and beds with sheets, and tea round our fireside, and slippers, and "to hear our names or voices we love".....⁴⁵

Notice how he engages not only the visual imagination, but also the aural imagination with reference to the "voices we love".

In the same talk, "Cairo Calling", he once again returns to the Scottish hills to create a romantic vision of home:

I remember one frosty evening shortly before I left to come out and see you, tramping over Scottish Border hills with Wallace Campbell, these hills that are green to the top and, to me, the friendliest of all hills, and when we came to a certain spot we saw a shining streak of silver glittering diamond-like in the now darkening hills - St. Mary's Loch in the distance.⁴⁶

Specific representational imagery: "tea round our fireside", give way for more impressionistic imagery: "silver glittering diamond-like". In both cases particular details are used to heighten the sense of presence. The travelling to a certain spot, followed by the "we saw", adds immediacy to this dusk viewing of St Mary's Loch. He continues: "Of course, had we gone that night we would have found that the silver of the loch had turned to blue".⁴⁷ Notice how he has used specific colours: green, silver, and blue. The result is, literally, a more colourful set of scenes. The

⁴⁵ R.S. Wright, *The Padre Presents: Discussions about Life in the Forces*, Edinburgh and London: Melagan and Cumming, 1944, p.90.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.90-91.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.91.

glittering silver is meant to represent the romantic memory of home, the blue the colder reality.

The point Wright is making is a simple one: “many of you out here have got an almost exaggerated view of the land you’ll return to one day.”⁴⁸ In other words, it may be like “silver glittering diamond-like” in the memory, but on return, home may be a more mundane colour. Wright in these examples demonstrates the ability to create a series of scenes with a few simple verbal brush strokes. The result is a simple, but powerful message.

iv. Ronald Wright’s Keener Sight

The homiletician, Thomas Troeger, emphasises the importance of alerting “the eye to keener sight”.⁴⁹ As it has been argued above, Wright demonstrates such “keen sight” in many of his other broadcasts. In a talk on “Prayer”, his “visit to a lonely Gunners’ site” provided another noteworthy image:

I saw two promontories jutting out into the sea-loch. One was bleak as ever bleak could be - jagged, stony ground with but one sad bent tree. The other, not 200 yards across the water from it was a glorious medley of colours from flowers and coloured shrubs and trees white with blossom or green with freshness of the first leaves.⁵⁰

It is as if Wright has becomes the listeners’ camera: snapping two contrasting shots which become crisper in definition by being placed next to each other. The image of “one sad bent tree” becomes even more desolate when placed alongside the image of “trees white with blossom or green with freshness of the first leaves.” It is interesting to notice that he not only demonstrates “keen sight” for detail and colour, but also makes subtle changes to what David Buttrick describes as the “focal field”. Buttrick

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.92.

⁴⁹ Thomas H. Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, Nashville, Abingdon, 1990, “Alert the Eye to Keener Sight”, pp.33-52.

⁵⁰ Ronald Selby Wright, *Let’s Ask the Padre - Some Broadcast Talks*, Second Edition, London and Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1943, p.98. (Hereafter referred to as R. Selby Wright, *Let’s Ask the Padre*, 1943.)

defines this phrase in these terms: “*Focal Field* can best be understood by imagining a camera lens which widened, can take in a large screen, or, narrowed down, will pick out particular objects.”⁵¹ In this example Wright has shifted or narrowed the attention of the listener, from the “bleak promontory” to the “bent tree”, and thereby narrows the “focal field”.

If we turn to some of Buttrick’s other categories, it is possible to analyse further elements of Wright’s pictorial discourse. Buttrick writes of “lens depth” which he defines as “the degree of self-engagement involved in point-of-view”.⁵² In this example, Wright keeps a distance from involvement in the scene, and maintains the point-of-view of an observer or static camera.

Apart from “focal field” and “lens depth”, Buttrick speaks of “focal depth” in discourse, which “refers to the degree of penetration into what we are observing.”⁵³ In the case of the two contrasting landscapes, they initially have a flat “focal depth”. In other words, there is little “penetration into what we are observing”. This, however, changes as Wright makes a move to explore the disparity of growth on the two promontories. In his eyes the transformation from “bleak stony ground” to a “glorious medley of colours”, is the result of “vision” and “hard-work”.⁵⁴ He is attempting to give his picture “focal depth”, and so penetrate the surface. In a transition, which is not entirely successful, he argues that prayer, which inspires vision and hard-work, can transform the rocky ground of people’s lives.

In this discussion so far, it has been argued that Wright’s conversational style and his use of engaging and “homely” pictorial language are but a few of the many broadcasting tools he used within his talks.⁵⁵ His success was perhaps due to this

⁵¹ David Buttrick, *Homiletic - Moves and Structures*, London: SCM Press, 1987, p.59.

⁵² *ibid.*, p.59.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p.61.

⁵⁴ Ronald Selby Wright, *Let’s Ask the Padre - Some Broadcast Talks*, Second Edition, London and Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1943, p.98.

⁵⁵ Another device he used frequently was the interview. See, for example, “The Padre Asks the Archbishop”, in Kenneth Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC 1922-1956*, 1984, Appendix 3, pp.543-546.

variation of style, as well his “keen eye” and his ability to recreate scenes for his listeners. In most of his talks however, his point-of-view, and the point-of-view the listener is encouraged to take, remain static.⁵⁶

In Buttrick’s terms Wright was skilled with “focal length” and “focal depth” in his pictures, but less at ease with “lens depth”, or allowing himself to become too involved in and through his word-pictures. Even after the tragically premature death of his friend Sergeant James Dagleish, only a few hours after being on air with Wright,⁵⁷ he resorts in the following week’s talk to the second hand “poetic imagery” of “green pastures” and “still waters” in Psalm 23.⁵⁸ Such “distance”⁵⁹ may reflect raw emotions rather than a lack of feeling for the death of his friend;⁶⁰ that he was moved is clear from the fact he delivers a talk not on the subject announced in *The Radio Times*, but one entitled: “On the Death of a Friend”. His simple, yet poetic, description of the last time he saw James Dagleish is vivid:

When he left me that night, as he shook hands, he smiled that grand smile of his. “Goodnight, Sir,” he said. “See you in the morning.” And then we parted, and looking round again, was a setting sun of a glorious summer evening in his face. He waved Some words I’d spoken a week or two back seem now almost strangely prophetic: “He’s gone. I do not understand. I only know that as he turned to go and waved his hand, in his young eyes a sudden glory shone, and I was dazzled by a sunset glow, and he was gone”.⁶¹

⁵⁶ For useful discussions on “Point-of-View” in Homiletics see: David Buttrick, *Homiletic - Moves and Structures*, London: SCM Press, 1987, pp.55-69, and for its relationship to ideology see: Paul Simpson, *Language, Ideology and Point of View*, London: Routledge, 1993.

⁵⁷ R. Selby Wright, *Let’s Ask the Padre*, 1943, pp.35-41. Wright notes, at the end of the interview/talk entitled “Sgt. Jimmie has more Questions”, that “three hours later and not 500 yards from where this talk was given Sgt. Dagleish was killed by enemy action”. He was putting out incendiaries.

⁵⁸ R. Selby Wright, “On the Death of a Friend” in *The Average Man*, 1942, p.98

⁵⁹ David Buttrick, *Homiletic - Moves and Structures*, London: SCM Press, 1987, p.59. “Distance is a peculiar category that is spatial, temporal and perhaps even emotional.”

⁶⁰ His diary entries effectively conclude after “Jimmie [James Dagleish] was killed.” R.S. Wright, *Personal Journal/Diary*, National Library, Edinburgh: Unpublished, 30th July, 1942, p.212.

⁶¹ Transcribed from radio programme on: *The Radio Padre*, BBC Radio 4, cited earlier in n.31.

In a number of other talks Wright adds pathos and insight to stories of loss and separation by the addition to the scene of visual details.⁶²

v. *Candle and Cross Images from Canon Green*

Wright used one particularly evocative word-picture which goes beyond loss and separation and on at least two separate occasions he skilfully turned it into a call to return.⁶³ It is distinctive in that it draws not from his own experience but heavily relies upon Canon Peter Green's⁶⁴ work *Watchers by the Cross* which was published in 1934.⁶⁵ The first time Wright used this picture it was in a radio talk entitled: "First Light" which was reflection on the Cross, and began with a graphic description of the "mixed company" in the Calvary scene.⁶⁶ Two thirds of the way through the talk⁶⁷ he makes a transition, introducing the new approach with a question:

Do you remember the lovely bit in *David Copperfield*? Mr Peggotty tells Ham and Mrs Gummidge to put a candle each night in the little window of their house, which you may remember was an upturned boat. You may remember little Emily had left her home and run away with Steerforth, and it had just broken poor old Peggotty's heart, and he was going through all the world to look for her. Do you remember how he said: "Every night as regular as night comes, the candle must be stood in the old pane of glass, that if ever she should see it, it may seem to say, 'Come back, my child, come back.'"? "What is the cross" says Canon Peter Green "but the candle set by our Heavenly Father's hand in the window to shine out through the darkness of sin and shame and guide us back to the Father's house and say to the wandering soul, 'Come back, my

⁶² See, for example, Ronald Selby Wright, *Haply I May Remember*, Edinburgh: W.Blackwood, 1970. He graphically describes a scene prior to the Dunkirk evacuation where a young dispatch rider joined Wright and several others who "prayed under the trees that summer evening". He movingly relates how one of the last requests of this dispatch rider was that they should pray, not for themselves, but for their relatives worrying at home.

⁶³ R. Selby Wright, *The Greater Victory*, 1943, "First Light", pp.83-9, and see also R. Selby Wright, *Lift Up Your Hearts*, "The Seven Words from the Cross", 23-28 March, 1964, BBC Home Service, p.5-6. Tuesday 24 March, "Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise", (Hereafter referred to as R. Selby Wright, *Lift Up Your Hearts*, 1964.)

⁶⁴ Canon Peter Green, 1871-1961, Canon Residentiary of Manchester, 1912-1956. I have been unable to locate another parallel reference anywhere else in Peter Green's extensive work.

⁶⁵ Peter Green, *Watchers by the Cross*, London: Longman, 1934.

⁶⁶ R. Selby Wright, *The Greater Victory*, 1943, "First Light", p.84.

⁶⁷ Paragraph 12 out of 18 in the published version.

child, come back' ?" And the soul who sees it takes heart to creep back trembling and to unlock the door which is never bolted or barred to find forgiveness in our true home.⁶⁸

Whilst he does cite Green in this talk, Wright appears happy to draw much of the surrounding commentary unacknowledged. Taking this "borrowing into account", it is intriguing to consider some of the elements of this story which may have attracted Wright.

The central, controlling image in this extract is that of the lighted candle shining nightly in the "old pane of glass". This is a simple, but powerful image. It was economically described by Green, and Wright appears to have found it memorable and useful. Wright retains specific details, but occasionally makes small adaptations to Green's choice of words.⁶⁹ He does not however adapt Dickens' memorable original phrases which include an "old pane of glass" and concludes with the call to "come back". One reason for Wright's retention of Dickens' original phrases and Greens' secondary details, was probably his intention to use the central image of a candle as a call or sign for his listeners to return.

On the grounds that Wright follows Green's example in two separate broadcasts and uses Dickens' evocative sign of a lighted candle, it is worth briefly considering how the decoding tool of semiotics might cast some light on the way Wright uses this sign for his own rhetorical ends.⁷⁰ In Peircean semiological terms,⁷¹ the candle goes

⁶⁸ R. Selby Wright, *The Greater Victory*, 1943, "First Light", p.87.

⁶⁹ For example, he changes Green's "boat-turned-house" to "an upturned boat" and "little window" becomes "window".

⁷⁰ In Saussurean semiological terms, the *signifier* is the "physical form," here the candle itself, and in this case the *signified* is the "mental concept" expressed in the call to "come home". Wright, like Green before him, extends the meaning of the lighted candle. His rhetorical objective in this context appears to be to persuade his listeners to return to their "Heavenly Father". In short, he uses the two elements of this sign, the signifier and the signified, as a way of extending the significance of this verbal picture. Marcel Danesi, *Messages and Meanings - An Introduction to Semiotics*, Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 1993. "A sign, according to Saussure, was made up of two parts: a *signifier* and *signified*. The *signifier* is the physical part of the sign, the actual part of which it is composed; the *signified* is the mental concept to which it refers." p.24.

⁷¹ John Fiske, *Introduction to Communication Studies*, 2nd Edition, London: Routledge, 1990. "Peirce divided signs into three types - icon, index, symbol." p.47

beyond being purely a *symbol* to entice Emily to return,⁷² it becomes linked with the cross, which itself is “a mixture of *icon* and *symbol*”.⁷³ The candle therefore is explicitly linked with the cross which is, according to Wright, who quotes Green verbatim, “set by our Heavenly Father’s hand in the window.” In “First Light”, it is almost as if the cross has become the candle and more than a candle. Consider, for example, the four verbs used: it shines out, shames, guides us back and speaks. This personification of the cross is given further colour by its connection with the image of the candle and its place in the story derived from Dickens.

The final section relies on the metaphor of an unbolted door. “A metaphor” argues Thomas Long, “seeks to create a new meaning, to help us experience the reality of something in a new way.”⁷⁴ Whilst this is a highly compressed understanding of metaphor, it is sufficient in this context, as it is clear from this extract that Wright wishes his listeners to “experience the reality” of forgiveness.

At this stage in the discussion it is important to reflect on how Wright uses both literal pictorial language and metaphoric pictorial language. It has already been argued that his descriptions of sleeping in the heather or of blitz-damaged London, derive their force from being easily recreated in his listener’s imagination. These verbal presentations of reality mark an attempt to connect with his audience. They also characterise an element of his significant skill as his radio broadcaster. In the above case, his retaining of swiftly recognisable terms, such as “candle” or “door” and familiar active verbs such as “creep back” or “bolted” are all embedded in a popular story, and add to the power and accessibility of his metaphor.

⁷² *ibid.*, p.48. “A *symbol* is a sign whose connection with its object is matter of convention, agreement, rule.”

⁷³ *ibid.*, p.48

⁷⁴ Thomas Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, Louisville, Kentucky: W/JKP, 1989, p.172. Metaphor and its use in homiletics is a rapidly growing field of research. See for example: Richard L. Eslinger, *Narrative and Imagination*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, pp.66-99; Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995, pp.243-55; Eduard R. Riegert, *Imaginative Shock: Preaching and Metaphor*, Burlington, Ont.: Trinity Press, 1990.

In this specific case, much of the skill lies not in Wright's construction, which is highly derivative, but in his choice and location of this illustration. Unlike Green before him, who had used the *David Copperfield* illustration to support his earlier assertion that "The Cross Draws!",⁷⁵ Wright uses this extended word picture as a transitional story to "move" from discussion of the cross to a fairly implicit appeal to his listeners.⁷⁶

This represents an imaginative approach to his broadcast talk. In the course of a talk on "Heaven and Hell", Wright himself makes a distinction between those with a literalistic mind and those with a more imaginative attitude. In his section on hell he argues:

Well, there are your traditional pictures - largely gathered by unimaginative people reading imaginative literature, or taking as literal imaginative pictures. What a lot of troubles we owe in this world to people without imagination.⁷⁷

It has been argued in this section that Wright frequently uses imaginative pictures, based on selective descriptions of reality, to bring colour into his radio talks. During the war he often demonstrates originality by fusing his experiences as a traveller and as a padre. His re-use of the *David Copperfield* illustration could be taken as evidence for his lack of imagination or his laziness in failing not to search for new pictures. It appears equally likely, however, on the basis of his wide-ranging choice of verbal pictures elsewhere in his radio talks, that this borrowing rather reflects his predilection for this particular image, and also his deftness at adapting a story which will assist his task.

It would be dangerous to argue too much on the basis of this one illustration, but it does point towards Wright's own penchant for graphic examples which weave together both literal and metaphoric pictorial language. Taken within the body of the

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p.26.

⁷⁶ "Move" is used here in the technical homiletical sense drawn from David Buttrick, *Homiletic, Moves and Structures*, London: SCM, 1987, see pp.23-79.

⁷⁷ R. Selby Wright, *Let's Ask the Padre*, 1943, p.68.

rest of his work considered, it highlights once again the way in which many of his verbal pictures were constructed around a comparatively static point-of-view.⁷⁸

It has been argued that for Ronald Selby Wright, the Radio Padre, this verbally visual approach contributed towards creating intimacy with his listeners, and thereby added to his popularity as a broadcaster. The analysis above has revealed a number of devices that Wright made use of. First, he used a conversational and easily understandable style of discourse. Secondly, he often painted pictures with words which drew on easily recognisable experiences, such as blitzed London, tea and slippers by the fireside or a lonely gunners' post. Thirdly, he became like a static camera for his audience, snapping his own experience and relaying it back verbally in graphic, engaging terms. Fourthly, he made use of secondary sources, such as Canon Peter Green and Dickens by extension, to provide further illuminating material. Wright was criticised during the war for using too many anecdotes,⁷⁹ and it is true that his verbal images might have been more detailed or original at times, but my contention is that his use of inclusive pictorial language provides a further explanation of his apparent success at connecting with many of his listeners. It is not surprising that a 1943 C.R.A.C. report on Religious Broadcasting comments that an "outstanding development in religious broadcasting in wartime has been talks by the Radio Padre."⁸⁰

Before moving on to C.S. Lewis it is worth noting a further reason for Wright's popularity amongst certain listeners, especially British prisoners of war. He was used in 1943 by MI9 to pass on coded messages.⁸¹ He admits that:

⁷⁸ On the basis of his series for *Lift Up Your Hearts* it appears that Wright's radio broadcasting style did not radically change. Clearly the advent and rise of television did not transform his approach to creating pictures in the air.

⁷⁹ W.E. Williams, "The Padre Again" in "Critic on the Hearth - Weekly Comments on BBC Programmes by Independent Critics", in *The Listener*, Vol. XXVII, 7th May 1942, p.695.

⁸⁰ *Religious Broadcasting - History and Current Practice, 1943*, unpublished report by Central Religious Advisory Committee (CRAC) held at BBC Archives, Caversham, R34/814/2 - Religious Broadcasting in Wartime 1941-1944, 1a, n.73.

⁸¹ See: M.R.D. Foot and J.M. Langley, *MI9*, London: Bodley Head, 1979, p.115. "The whole talk was thereupon taken down in shorthand - accidents allowing - in several prisoner of war camps, and the text was puzzled out afterwards."

when I started the talks “Good evening forces” in fact I was coding the message and when I came to the word “but” it meant the code was over..... so I did that for a considerable time. It nearly drove me mad.⁸²

Perhaps such knowledge, would also have tempered C.R.A.C.’s compliments. It is hard to imagine the use today of a preacher coding a sermon for his congregation to decode later at home, unless he is keen they should listen particularly carefully for specific words.

This fascinating extra dimension highlights the extraordinary and highly pressurised situation in which Wright worked.⁸³ Any homiletician seeking to glean lessons from his broadcasting practice needs to bear this context in mind. On the basis of this brief interpretation of Wright’s popularity as a broadcaster it would be possible to assert that preachers should travel extensively, speak naturally and create engaging verbal pictures of the Scottish borders. This is too simple. It ignores changing historical contexts and the distinctive characteristics of preaching and radio. In short, it represents an over swift move from descriptive analysis to homiletical imperative.

A more sophisticated approach will take into account: the historical context of Wright’s work, the critique by commentators such as Williams, the particular nature of religious radio during the Second World War, and the considerable gap between communicating effectively in a studio in the 1940s and in the pulpit in the 1990s. A hermeneutically more robust approach will bear these points in mind. It will then attempt to identify principles from Wright’s practice which will translate into a different cultural and communicative context. As such an approach also needs to be employed with C.S. Lewis, the discussion of any implications for preachers will be delayed until the conclusion of this chapter.

⁸² R.S. Wright, interviewed by BBC, transcript with Rev. David G. Coulter, p.7. It is clear from this interview that Wright was uneasy about this practice, partially because there was something “two faced” about using a religious talk for passing on coded messages and also because he believed it was “ruining” his talks at the beginning as he “had to alter” parts “in order to fit in the code”. For an interesting parrallel in biblical literature see: *Revelation* and *Mark*.

⁸³ Wright goes into some detail to explain how: “the life I was leading at that time really was extremely difficult.” *ibid.*, p.8.

3. *The Radio Academic - C.S. Lewis*

Lewis had no interest whatsoever in the radio as such, a harsh contraption the sound of which he cringed at every time he heard it bellowing from his gardener's bungalow.⁸⁴

It is ironic that C.S. Lewis, an Oxford academic and Christian apologist, who initially "hardly listened to radio",⁸⁵ would become a popular war-time broadcaster.⁸⁶ In 1944 Anne Fremantle claimed in *Commonweal* :

Miss Dorothy Sayers, Father Ronald Knox, Miss Barbara Ward and above all, Mr C.S. Lewis, are definitely religious radio stars.⁸⁷

This particular "religious radio star" likened his broadcasting to a "procrustean bed".⁸⁸ Despite his apparent dislike for radio work, his broadcasts provide an interesting parallel to the radio style employed by Wright, who, surprisingly is not mentioned here by Fremantle. It will be argued in this section that in certain areas Lewis broadcasts in different ways from the Radio Padre. Rarely does he act as a static camera, and more frequently, he uses pictorial language as a tool by which to sharpen his analogies or amplify his metaphors and thus reinforce his underlying argument. In order to consider Lewis' contrasting approach a number of specific extracts will be considered. Before moving to this textual analysis, the background to and details of Lewis' radio work will be briefly considered.

⁸⁴ Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis*, London: Collins, 1974, p.201.

⁸⁵ William Griffin, *C.S. Lewis, The Authentic Voice*, London: Lion, 1988 (1986), p.184.

⁸⁶ Joseph Dowell, for example, in a letter to Walter Hooper would describe C.S. Lewis' broadcasts on *What Christians Believe* as "magnificent, unforgettable", see Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis*, London: Collins, 1974, p.209.

⁸⁷ Carolyn Keefe, "On the Air", in *C.S. Lewis, Speaker and Teacher*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974 (1971) edited by Carolyn Keefe, p.148.

⁸⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Letters of C.S. Lewis*, London: Fount, 1988 (1966), edited by W.H. Lewis 1966 and revised by Walter Hooper in 1988, p.198. "Procrustes' Bed: Procrustes in Greek legend, was a robber of Attica, who placed all who fell into his hands upon an iron bed. If they were longer than the bed he cut off the overhanging parts, if shorter he stretched them till they fitted." Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, Revised Edition, Ivor H. Evans, London: Cassell, 1981 (1870), p.895.

Lewis, like Wright, was invited by the then Head of Religious Broadcasting, James Welch,⁸⁹ to broadcast:

The microphone is a limiting, and often irritating, instrument, but the quality of thinking and deep conviction which I find in your book [*The Problem of Pain*] ought surely to be shared with a great many other people.⁹⁰

Lewis' broadcasts were not defined by Welch or Eric Fenn his producer, but he was influenced and even constrained by their advice.⁹¹ It is impossible to divorce the broadcasting of either Lewis or Wright from Welch, and the Reithian institution which provided them with their platform, or in this case with their microphone.⁹² Nevertheless, within the broadcasting parameters set up for them, both Lewis and Wright developed an approach to speaking on the radio which would exploit the limitations of the microphone to their own advantage, and gain them national recognition.

C.S. Lewis' series of war-time radio talks, and in particular the broadcast pictorial language he uses, could be interpreted solely as the product of an imaginative academic. Lewis is sometimes described as an armchair-thinker, who had little

⁸⁹ See: Wolfe's chapter on "New Approaches: James Welch", in Kenneth Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC 1922-1956*, 1984, pp.145-204. He provides a useful insight into Welch's "bipolar ministry", in which he attempted to serve as a "priest of the Church of England and as a servant of the Corporation" (p.145). Welch, according to Wolfe, "wanted the single Christian message, however difficult to define, plainly broadcast without the suggestion of a species of "BBC religion" which was but a spurious mixture of the simplest Protestant ethic (p.154). Nevertheless, Welch's selection of broadcasters, was *predominantly* white, male and middle-class, and almost always what he viewed as orthodox Christian. This inevitably shaped the form and content of religious broadcasting to be heard on the BBC during the Second World War.

⁹⁰ J.W. Welch to C.S. Lewis, letter 7 February, 1941. (*The Problem of Pain* is added by this author.) Also cited in Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis*, London: Collins, 1974, p.201.

⁹¹ See, for example, Eric Fenn's letter to Professor C.S. Lewis, 29th December 1943, BBC Archives, Caversham, 910/Talks File 1a, 1941-43. Fenn encloses Lewis' seven talks on "What Christians believe about the nature of God?" and advises Lewis about timings: "we usually reckon 1,750 words for a 15 minute talk". He asks Lewis to expand them. Fenn also suggests a significant change to Lewis' third talk, using the candle metaphor to start his broadcast as a bridge for the "listener who has not heard the previous talks without damaging your arguments." It appears that Lewis took Fenn's advice regarding timings, but not regarding the controlling metaphor. Lewis was clearly "producible", if not malleable.

⁹² See, Ian McIntyre, *The Expense of Glory - A Life of John Reith*, London: Harper Collins, 1993. This excellent biography provides useful insights into how Reith's understanding of Christianity influenced religious broadcasting in the BBC.

experience of the world outside academia. Such a view fails to take into consideration Lewis' traumatic trench experiences in the First World War, where he was injured and forced to return home.⁹³ His chest injury would also prevent him from active service in the Second World War.⁹⁴ Whilst Lewis did not travel nearly as extensively as the peripatetic Radio Padre, part of his small contribution to the war effort was to trek around the country giving talks to men in various RAF stations.⁹⁵ This taxing task extended Lewis' experience of attempting to communicate complex ideas in accessible and memorable language.⁹⁶

This was a skill he would also develop in his broadcasts during the war.⁹⁷ James Welch wanted "something like *The Christian Faith as I See it* - by a layman".⁹⁸ The result was a series of four broadcasts which "began in the late summer of 1941",⁹⁹ and were billed in *The Radio Times* as *Right and Wrong: A Clue to the Meaning of the Universe*. He was "overwhelmed by letters even before finishing his four talks".¹⁰⁰ His second series, this time of five talks, was entitled *What Christians Believe* and was broadcast in early 1942.¹⁰¹ Some biographers are extremely positive about this aspect of Lewis' work:

⁹³ A.N. Wilson, *C.S. Lewis - A Biography*, London: Harper Collins, 1990, p.56. "During the battle of Arras on 15 April 1918, Lewis was on Mount Bernenchon. He was standing near his dear friend Sergeant Ayres when a shell exploded. It killed Ayres outright and the splinters from it hit Lewis in the leg, the hand, the face and just under the arm. This last splinter touched his lung and momentarily winded him."

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p.179.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.179.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p.179. Lewis would often use simple questions such as "Why we think there is a Right and Wrong", as a foundation for exploring the existence of God and then the relevance of the Christian position. His talks to the RAF were described as a "success, but in a limited sphere", Roger L. Green and Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: A Biography*, 1974, p.207.

⁹⁷ Walter Hooper argues that: "The discipline all this [doing radio talks] forced upon him almost certainly contributed to what was already a singular talent of Lewis's - that of distilling something of great importance into few words without loss of meaning", in the introduction to C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Macmillan: New York, 1984, An Anniversary Edition of the Three Books: *The Case for Christianity*, *Christian Behaviour*, and *Beyond Personality*, p.xiv.

⁹⁸ Kenneth Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC 1922-1956*, 1984, p.200 and see letter from Welch to Lewis, 7th February 1941.

⁹⁹ A.N. Wilson, *C.S. Lewis - A Biography*, London: Harper Collins, 1990, p.180. Lewis travelled by train from Oxford to London every Wednesday night to broadcast between 7.45 and 8.00. See also: Roger L. Green and Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: A Biography*, 1974, p.202.

¹⁰⁰ Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis*, London: Collins, 1974, p.203.

¹⁰¹ 4.45-5.00pm, on 11 / 18 January and 1 / 8 / 15 February 1942.

The clarity of Lewis's thought, his ability to encapsulate a great many facts into a few words is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in these broadcasts.¹⁰²

Such positive evaluation should be read critically as there is at times a tendency in some of the vast literature surrounding Lewis' life and work to slip into hagiography or even "Lewis idolatry".¹⁰³ According to his Presbyterian producer, Reverend Eric Fenn,¹⁰⁴ the BBC research highlighted how Lewis' broadcasts divided people. He wrote to Lewis: "They obviously either regard you as "the cat's whiskers" or as "beneath contempt"."¹⁰⁵

Such contrasting evaluations can also be seen in different biographers' comments. On the positive side, George Sayer is enthusiastic:

His rich voice, educated yet earthy, came across perfectly. The extraordinary vitality that was characteristic of his best Oxford lectures made an unforgettable impression on almost everybody who listened, Christians and unbelievers alike.¹⁰⁶

By contrast, Humphrey Carpenter is a more critical voice, arguing that:

Lewis was not exactly at his best at the microphone; or rather, his use of the medium emphasised the more dogmatic side of his character. Radio brought out neither his stentorian power nor his

¹⁰² Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis*, London: Collins, 1974, p.209.

¹⁰³ Lyle W. Dorsett, "Researching C.S. Lewis": "Since his death almost 60 books have been written and edited on Lewis' life and work, hundreds of magazine and journal articles have appeared, and almost one hundred and fifty master's and doctoral dissertations have been prepared on this author." In Andrew Walker and James Patrick, editors, *A Christian for all Christians*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990, p.213. See also: A.N. Wilson, *C.S. Lewis - A Biography*, London: Harper Collins, 1990. In his Preface Wilson speaks of "Lewis idolatry" p.xvi, and concludes that: "We do Lewis no honour to make him into a plaster saint." p.xviii.

¹⁰⁴ Kenneth Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC 1922-1956*, 1984, p.145, 147 and passim.

¹⁰⁵ Letter of Fenn to Lewis, 23 March 1944, also cited in William Griffin, *C.S. Lewis, The Authentic Voice*, London: Lion, 1988 (1986), p.221. "For each of these BBC talks, Lewis was paid ten guineas and offered vouchers for the train. The vouchers he took; the fees he asked the BBC to send to a number of worthy and needy people." p.202.

¹⁰⁶ George Sayer, *Jack - A Life of C.S. Lewis*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997, pp.277-8. Sayer describes a memorable scene: "I remember being at a pub filled with Soldiers on one Wednesday evening. At a quarter to eight, the bartender turned the radio up for Lewis. "You listen to this bloke," he shouted. "He's really worth listening to." And those soldiers did listen attentively for the entire fifteen minutes." p.278.

flashes of wit, and his broadcasting manner was formal and rather restrained. But he spoke clearly and unhesitatingly, and the talks were considered a great success, not least because of the large number of letters which resulted from them.....¹⁰⁷

The fact that he was invited to do more broadcasts also suggests a certain degree of perceived success. These were entitled *Christian Behaviour* and ran for eight consecutive Sundays at 2.50-3.05pm from 20th September until 8th November, 1942. His earlier sets of talks were all delivered live, but his final seven-part war-time series, *Beyond Personality*, were pre-recorded and broadcast weekly at 10.15-10.30pm between the 22nd February and 4th April 1944.¹⁰⁸ All of his talks would later be published, without much adaptation, as *Broadcast Talks* (1942), *Christian Behaviour* (1943) and *Beyond Personality* (1944).¹⁰⁹ A.N. Wilson's assessment of these broadcasts is illuminating:

His intention in the lively fifteen-minute talks was to answer such questions as "Can an intelligent person be a Christian?" "What should a Christian's attitude be towards war, sex or money?" "Is there a heaven and a hell?" He answers these questions with a breeziness and self-confidence which on an academic podium would have been totally unacceptable. And the language and idiom of the broadcasts has dated.....¹¹⁰

This debatable final point raises the question of whether Lewis' use of pictorial language has also dated. As suggested above other biographers are more positive about the skill, effectiveness and thoughtfulness of Lewis' broadcasting.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings - C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams and Their Friends*. London: Harper and Collins, 1997 (1978), p.183.

¹⁰⁸ Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis*, London: Collins, 1974, pp.210-211.

¹⁰⁹ C.S. Lewis, *Broadcast Talks* (1942), *Christian Behaviour* (1943) and *Beyond Personality* (1944) were each published in London by Geoffrey Bles.

¹¹⁰ A.N. Wilson, *C.S. Lewis - A Biography*, London: Harper Collins, 1990, pp.180-1.

¹¹¹ See: Chad Walsh, *The Literary Legacy of C.S. Lewis*, London: Sheldon, 1979. Lewis, according to Walsh does "an amazingly effective job of presenting Christian belief in brief radio addresses. The achievement is all the more remarkable, for Lewis scorns any talking down. He assumes that a miscellaneous radio audience is capable of wrestling with the high points and complications of Christian theology." p.208. See, also, George Sayer, *Jack - A Life of C.S. Lewis*, cited earlier, n.106.

i. Refined Pictures: Finding the Appropriate Image

Lewis has received so much acclaim for remarkably apt and visual analogies in illustrating complex issues, it's worth noting that he took trouble over these.¹¹²

William Hooper's assertion finds support from a careful reading of Lewis's original scripts. For example, one point, which Hooper also notes, is to be found in the script for *Right or Wrong: A Clue to the Meaning of the Universe - Materialism or Religion?* which was broadcast at 7.45 to 8.00 pm on 20th August 1941. Lewis had originally written:

If there was a controlling power outside the universe, it could not show itself to us as one of the facts inside the universe - no more than an author of a play could walk in as one of the characters in the play.¹¹³

Intriguingly, above the typed script Lewis has altered the analogy, adding in his own writing: "no more than the operator in a cinema could himself appear on the screen." The analogy is altered yet again in the published book, to read: "..... no more than the architect of a house could actually be a wall or staircase or fireplace in that house."¹¹⁴ Unlike the first two images, where it is possible to imagine the author or cinema operator appearing in the drama, it is harder to conceive of the architect in the building itself (unless, peradventure, he were to fall into the cement-mixer). The point to underline here is the care with which Lewis refines his analogies.

This can be seen elsewhere in other original broadcasting scripts. For example, in a talk broadcast on 15th February, 1942, he again adapts his original image. In this talk on *What Christians Believe* he explores what it means to have the "Christ-life"

¹¹² Walter Hooper, editor, C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Macmillan: New York, 1984, An Anniversary Edition of the Three Books: *The Case for Christianity*, *Christian Behaviour*, and *Beyond Personality*, p.xv. (Also author of introduction.)

¹¹³ C.S. Lewis, *Right or Wrong: A Clue to the Meaning of the Universe - Materialism or Religion?* BBC Archives, Caversham, 921/Lewis Scripts, p.4.

¹¹⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Macmillan: New York, 1984, An Anniversary Edition of the Three Books: *The Case for Christianity*, *Christian Behaviour*, and *Beyond Personality*, p.21.

dwelling inside. In the original typed script he suggests that “it’s not merely the spreading of an idea; its more like evolution - a biological or super-biological fact.” In pen, he has crossed this out and replaced it with a more specific analogy: “it’s more like transforming, like a caterpillar becoming a chrysalis.”¹¹⁵ Later in the same talk, where he argues that “God never meant man to be a purely spiritual creature” he has put a line through the general phrase “the bodily process of eating and drinking” and above, written in pen the more specific and active phrase: “he [God] uses physical things like bread and wine,” to make his point that: “He [God] likes matter. He invented it.”¹¹⁶

These adaptations in Lewis’ own hand-writing on his original scripts provide concrete evidence that he did “take trouble” over selecting the appropriate visual analogy. In these amendments, we catch a glimpse of Lewis the English scholar, author of the ground-breaking *Allegory of Love*,¹¹⁷ wrestling to create visual analogies which will both connect and communicate appropriately with his listeners. It is useful to bear this craftsmanship in mind as we concentrate on a number of specific examples from Lewis’ broadcasts.

ii. Topical Pictures: Enemy Occupied Territory

Consider the images which build this metaphor:

Why is God landing in this enemy-occupied world in disguise and starting a sort of secret society to undermine the devil?¹¹⁸

It is almost as if Lewis has turned God into an undercover agent, stealthily penetrating into a war-zone. Such a surprising transference of roles is at the heart of many of Lewis’ analogies. In this example, the question is brought alive by the graphic picture

¹¹⁵ C.S. Lewis, *What Christians Believe*. 4.45-5.00pm, Sunday 15th February 1942, original script held at BBC Archives, Caversham, 921/Lewis Scripts, p.4.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.4.

¹¹⁷ C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, London: Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford, 1936.

¹¹⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Broadcast Talks*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1942, p.61.

of “God landing” and a phrase redolent with meaning in the early 1940s: “enemy-occupied”. Given the German occupation of much of Europe at this time, his inquiry gains force through topicality, the provocative image of God in disguise, and the echoing of an earlier phrase where he had stated: “God has landed on this enemy-occupied world in human form”.¹¹⁹ The Lewis critic, Joe R. Christopher, describes this as an “interesting image that runs throughout *What Christians Believe*”.

Christopher believes that the use of “landed” in this talk suggests an “invasion from the sea”, which “was not unusual for saboteurs in Europe during that time in the war.”¹²⁰

In short, Lewis has made an intriguing pictorial connection between his understanding of the Incarnation and an image easily recognisable to the listeners of that day.

iii. *Connecting Pictures: Ships Sailing in Formation*

Another example of Lewis’ attempt to make his theology more accessible through analogy can be found in his later set of talks, *Christian Behaviour*, where he makes the imaginative link between humanity and a fleet of ships:

Think of us as a fleet of ships sailing in formation. The voyage will be a success only, in the first place, if the ships don’t collide and get in another’s way; and, secondly, if each ship is seaworthy and has her engines in good order.¹²¹

Lewis develops this “extended analogy”¹²² further as he articulates the view of those who believe that it: “...doesn’t matter what his ship is like inside provided that he doesn’t run into the next ship.”¹²³ He will later critique such an individualistic view, arguing that morality is relevant not only to the creation of harmony inside personalities, but also between individuals, and within the whole of humanity. His

¹¹⁹ C.S. Lewis, *Broadcast Talks*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1942, p.51. This image recurs throughout this talk appearing at the end of the second chapter, the fourth and at the end of the fifth.

¹²⁰ Joe R. Christopher, *C.S. Lewis*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981, p.71.

¹²¹ C.S. Lewis, *Christian Behaviour - A Further Series of Broadcast Talks*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1943. (Hereafter referred to as: C.S. Lewis, *Christian Behaviour*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1943.)

¹²² Joe R. Christopher, *C.S. Lewis*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981, p.69.

¹²³ C.S. Lewis, *Christian Behaviour*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1943, p.9.

method in this extract is based on an attempt to invite his audience to make an imaginative leap.

The “imaginative shock”,¹²⁴ to borrow the phrase of the Canadian homiletician Eduard Reigert, is created here by the encouragement to think that we as humans are like a “formation of ships”. In other words, the power of this image is created, not simply by drawing upon “a British and wartime interest” in naval affairs,¹²⁵ but also by the extraordinary connection between ourselves and a fleet of ships. In this case, the basic pictorial language, of the “ships sailing in formation” is the building block of Lewis’ analogy.

iv. Shocking Pictures: Food Strip-Teases

A further example of Lewis’ ability to create “shocking” connections between images is to be found in his discussion of “sexual morality”:

You can get a large audience together for a strip-tease act - that is, to watch a girl undress on the stage: now suppose you come to a country where you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate on to the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let every one see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, wouldn't you think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food?¹²⁶

This argument by analogy partially depends upon the use of pictorial language, and the graphic revealing of the mutton chop. Joe Christopher rather generously describes this as a “delightful analogy” of a “country in which food is gradually revealed striptease fashion.”¹²⁷ Such an assessment fails to recognise the surprising and ultimately shocking nature of this picture. Lewis’ aim is to show how the “sex instinct” has in some way gone wrong or become corrupted. Once again it is the

¹²⁴ E.R. Riegert, *Imaginative Shock: Preaching and Metaphor*, Burlington, Ont.: Trinity Press, 1990.

¹²⁵ Joe R. Christopher, *C.S. Lewis*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981, p.69.

¹²⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Christian Behaviour*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1943, p.27.

¹²⁷ Joe R. Christopher, *C.S. Lewis*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981, p.70.

specific details, such as the unmasking just “before the lights go out”, which add to the atmosphere of this memorable and somewhat strange act.

v. *Approximate Pictures: Pointing to Reality*

Another extract provides a useful insight into Lewis’ own understanding of creating pictures in the mind. In his talk where he has been discussing “What Christians Believe”, he moves into the world of science and a consideration of how scientists explain the atom. Lewis argues that they:

..... give you a description out of which you can make a mental picture. But then they warn you that this picture is not what the scientists actually believe. What the scientists believe is a mathematical formula. The pictures are there only to help understand the formula. They are not really true in the way that the formula is; they don’t give you the real thing but only something more or less like it.¹²⁸

This provides a fascinating insight not only into Lewis’ understanding of scientific method, but also perhaps his view of the role of pictorial language. It is a pointer to reality, rather than the reality itself. It does not “give you the real thing but only something more or less like it”. More poetically it might be argued C.S. Lewis used pictorial language in his broadcasts to entice his listeners to step “through the wardrobe” and move “further up and further in”,¹²⁹ encouraging them towards a new view on the world and their own lives. His verbal pictures are intended to provide an approximate view rather than an exact representation. If this is a correct understanding of Lewis’ position, then it reflects what might almost be described as his “casualness” with many verbal pictures.

¹²⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Broadcast Talks*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1942, p.53.

¹²⁹ See: C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch & The Wardrobe*, London: Fontana Lions, 1980(1950), pp.12-13. “Further up and Further in” is a recurring statement in: C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, London: Fontana Lions, 1980 (1956), p.153 ff.

vi. Temporary Pictures: From Clocks via Roads to Arithmetic

Another extract, this time from his talk on “Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe”, in August, 1941, underlines his quick-fire use of pictorial language. In this talk Lewis argues that humanity is on the “wrong road”, has been “making some big mistake”, and needs to change direction. To reinforce this point he uses three common images: first, the picture of “putting the clock back” is followed by a rhetorical question: “Would you think I was joking if I said that you *can* put a clock back, and that if the clock is wrong it is often a very sensible thing to do?” Secondly, a new picture is introduced to support this point: “If you’re on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road.”¹³⁰ Thirdly, the previous images are reinforced by an example from arithmetic: “When I have started a sum the wrong way, the sooner I admit this and go back and start again, the faster I shall get on.”¹³¹

This series of pictures is a good example of how in many of his radio talks Lewis often paints a picture in the air, and immediately reinforces it by painting another. It is as if he creates one picture, only to lay it aside or discard it and sketch a new one. The result of such an approach is to create a temporary feel to many of his images and analogies. This observation provides a qualification to those, like A.N. Wilson, who critique the effects of Lewis’ style. Wilson may be correct to challenge Lewis’ theology in the picture of humans becoming “slugs or crabs” as a parallel to the incarnation,¹³² but his critique fails to recognise the nature of many of Lewis’ verbal pictures. These may be refined images, but are basically quick sketches rather than carefully executed master-pieces. “Lewis, in these radio addresses,” according to Joe Christopher, “explains matters simply and uses an analogy for every difficult idea.”¹³³ The reason for this approach is not simply to explain difficult ideas, but also surely because Lewis is attempting to hold his listeners’ attention, by using startling and

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, p.29.

¹³¹ *ibid.*, p.29.

¹³² A.N. Wilson, *C.S. Lewis - A Biography*, London: Harper Collins, 1990, p.181.

¹³³ Joe R. Christopher, *C.S. Lewis*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981, p.72.

provocative analogies. These often rely upon pictorial language for their form and shape.

vii. Oral Pictures: Lewis' "Real Talk"

It is not entirely surprising therefore that Lewis' three books, *Broadcast Talks*, *Christian Behaviour* and *Beyond Personality*, which were closely based on his radio talks, retain much of their oral character. Lewis admitted: "In the printed versions I made a few additions to what I had said at the microphone, but otherwise left the text much as it had been."¹³⁴ Later he wisely suggested that "a 'talk' on the radio should, I think, be as like real talk as possible, and should not sound like an essay being read aloud."¹³⁵

Lewis attempted to put this into practice throughout his radio talks. One of the most explicit examples of "real talk" is when he offered an apology at the start of a broadcast in August, 1941:

I must begin by apologising for my voice. Since we last met I've managed to catch an absolute corker of a cold. Should you hear this talk suddenly interrupted by a loud crash you needn't jump to any rash conclusion. It'll probably only be me sneezing or coughing. Well, the point I got to last week was.....¹³⁶

Unsurprisingly, this apology is not included in the published text. By suggesting that he and his listeners have met before, and through gentle irony about his cold, he attempts to establish a connection between himself and his listeners.

Like Wright, Lewis, normally employed a conversational tone of voice. One critic observes:

¹³⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Glasgow: Fount, Collins Paperbacks, 1977 (1952), p.5.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p.5.

¹³⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Right or Wrong: A Clue to the Meaning of the Universe*, 7.45-8.00pm, August 1941, cited in Walter Hooper's introduction to C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Macmillan: New York, 1984, An Anniversary Edition of the Three Books: *The Case for Christianity*, *Christian Behaviour*, and *Beyond Personality*, p.xiv-xv.

He neither whispers nor shouts. Never does he display the vocal antics of the high-powered salesman, the fiery orator, or the impassioned evangelist, but he uses force and emphasis on a conversational level to intensify meanings and to sharpen contrasts.¹³⁷

It is impossible as a reader to recreate Lewis' baritone, resonant, and conversational tones,¹³⁸ but it is important to read the pictorial language in these three short books as the product of oral discourse, rather than as prose which is intended to be read as a carefully considered literary piece.

Moreover, it is also vital to recognise, with Carolyn Keefe, that:

..... unless Lewis' voice captures the pathos, the humour, the irony, unless from the analogies, instances, and illustrations it evokes sensory images within the mind of the listener, even his most excellent script will remain nothing but a sheaf of splendid writing.¹³⁹

The skill with which Lewis "evokes sensory images within the mind of the listener" is partially based on the use of his voice, but also the way in which he edited and simplified his expression for his radio talks. He himself admits: "If you are allowed to talk for only ten minutes pretty well everything has to be sacrificed to brevity."¹⁴⁰ In spite of his abbreviated approach, Lewis appears to have received positive responses in many circles. Carolyn Keefe analysed thirty three contemporary reviews (3 Protestant, 10 Secular, 20 Roman Catholic) of these talks.¹⁴¹ The majority were positive. Robert Speaight, for example, writing in *The Tablet* argued that Lewis was a "born broadcaster" who "neither buttonholes you nor bombards you; there is no false intimacy and no false eloquence."¹⁴² Lewis intended to create a "popular" or "familiar" tone in his talks.¹⁴³

¹³⁷ Carolyn Keefe, editor, *C.S. Lewis, Speaker and Teacher*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974 (1971), pp.173-4.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, pp.173-4

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, pp.176-177.

¹⁴⁰ C.S. Lewis, *Christian Behaviour*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1943, p.7. See following the chapter of this thesis for discussion of talking in a 2minute 45 second slot.

¹⁴¹ C. Keefe, ed., *C.S. Lewis, Speaker and Teacher*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974, p.152.

¹⁴² Robert Speaight, "Clear Reasoning" in *The Tablet*, 18 July, 1942. Also cited by Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis*, London: Collins, 1974, p.210, and Carolyn Keefe, editor, *C.S.*

viii. *Transformative Pictures: Speaking for Change*

Behind this familiar style and rich voice is a rhetorical objective. Lewis confesses:

I'm not preaching I'm only trying to call attention to a fact; we have failed to practise ourselves the kind of behaviour we expect from other people.¹⁴⁴

In the same way as Wright sought to stimulate his listeners' imagination by using verbal pictures, so Lewis attempted to construct a familiar world for his audience and then extend it: "This world is a great sculptor's shop. We are statues and there is a rumour going round the shop that some of us some day are going to come to life."¹⁴⁵ Notice, the economy of language and the way in which Lewis creates a shop, only to surprise his listeners by telling them who is in it. In this extract from *Beyond Personality* Lewis is attempting to persuade his listeners to recognise the gulf between their biological and spiritual life.

Lewis' use of pictorial language is often tightly integrated into the fabric and logic of his talks. He appears to create verbal pictures not simply to connect with his listeners, but also to lead them on, "into something beyond" and to "catch a glimpse" of another "country".¹⁴⁶ This evocative language is typical of Lewis, and sets him apart from Wright's more straightforward style.

In a later radio talk, published in *Beyond Personality*, Lewis explores the idea that acting in a certain manner can be transformative of character. He asks: "May I once again start by putting two pictures, or two stories rather, into your mind?" First, he

Lewis, *Speaker and Teacher*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974 (1971), pp.154-5. Contrast with Humphrey Carpenter's evaluation earlier in this chapter, n.109.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, p.5.

¹⁴⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Broadcast Talks*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1942, p.12. In a letter to Sister Penelope on 15 May 1941, Lewis explains how his radio talks "are *preparatio evangelica* rather than evangelism, an attempt to convince people that there is a moral law, that we disobey it." *Letters of C.S. Lewis*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1996, p.193.

¹⁴⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Beyond Personality*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1944, p.14.

¹⁴⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Christian Behaviour*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1943, p.64.

draws from the fairy tale of *Beauty and the Beast*, and then, secondly, he tells a story which:

..... is about someone who had to wear a mask; a mask which made him look much nicer than he really was. He had to wear it for years. And when he took it off he found his own face had grown to fit it. He was now really beautiful. What had begun as a disguise had become a reality.¹⁴⁷

It is interesting to notice how Lewis initially describes this as a picture and then corrects himself to describe it as a story. Perhaps a “pictorial story” would be a more accurate description. Behind this visual tale is a profound understanding of how practice or action can be formative. Using language in this pictorial fashion may also have a transformative effect on the listener.

Doris Myers intriguingly argues that Lewis “fought the low view of language”¹⁴⁸ and “also followed the time-honoured tradition of expressing high thought in a lowly medium”.¹⁴⁹ Myers is referring here to Lewis’ work in science fiction and fantasy, but given Lewis’ initial attitude towards radio as a “lowly medium”, this statement could be extended to include the idea that his intention was to express “high thought in a lowly medium” also through his radio talks. The critic Robert Speaight would have argued that Lewis was largely successful in this aim:

These talks are models of their kind, fresh and original in the illustrations used to clothe the basic arguments for accepting the Christian revelation.¹⁵⁰

The significant word in this comment is “clothe” as it implies that each of Lewis’ pictures contained the kernel of an idea which he then dressed pictorially. Such a

¹⁴⁷ C.S. Lewis, *Beyond Personality*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1944, p.35.

¹⁴⁸ Doris Myers, *C.S. Lewis in Context*, Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1994. “He fought the low view of language, which would make of the eternal logos a mechanical operation of word associations”. p.214.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.217.

¹⁵⁰ Robert Speaight, “Clear Reasoning” in *The Tablet*, 18 July, 1942, p.32.

view reduces Lewis' pictorial language to being merely the exterior covering for, rather than an integral part of his thought.

The frequency with which Lewis uses and refines his pictorial language to form his metaphors, sharpen his analogies, and also develop his arguments suggest that this was more than a rhetorical device, it was at the heart of how he himself envisaged and imagined the "Christian revelation".¹⁵¹ If this was the case, it may further explain the ease with which Lewis made topical pictorial allusions, surprising pictorial connections, and swift pictorial transitions.

3. Conclusion

Lewis and Wright both drew frequently upon common experience as sources for their broadcasting, but the end result was often contrasting. It is illuminating to place Wright's representational descriptions of lonely promontories, deserted valleys and blitzed London streets beside Lewis' more metaphoric word pictures of fleets of ships, strip-tease acts and God in disguise. It could be compared with putting a Constable beside a Turner. Constable concentrating on graphic detail to create the impressive landscape, Turner going beyond the scene itself, focusing instead upon the light swirling amongst the clouds.¹⁵² Similarly, Wright often used the details of scenery to create an atmosphere and root his story in reality, while Lewis frequently created surprising connections to lead his listeners beyond the mundane to a new vision. Obviously as broadcasters they relied not on paint but on words to create mental pictures in their listeners' imaginations.

¹⁵¹ I would suggest it was also at the heart of his narrative method. He admits: "One thing I am sure of. All my seven Narnian books, and my three science fiction books, all began with a picture of a faun carrying an umbrella and parcels in a snowy wood. The picture had been in my mind since I was about sixteen. Then one day, when I was about forty, I said to myself: Let's try to make a story about it." C.S. Lewis, *Of Other Worlds - Essays and Stories*, edited by Walter Hooper, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1966, "It all began with a picture", p.42.

¹⁵² See *History of British Art*, written and presented by Andrew Graham-Dixon, BBC 2, 19th May 1996, On Constable: "By painting so large he dared to suggest the most ordinary subjects might also be the most profound ones." On Turner: "He was more concerned with the light than the subjects".

In this chapter, selected examples from radio talks by these two popular religious broadcasters have been produced to support the argument that, prior to the popularisation of television, conversational discourse and pictorial language were significant elements of successful religious radio broadcasting. The variety of ways in which Wright and Lewis made use of these tools may partially explain their success. It is important to underline that this chapter has not attempted to provide a comprehensive analysis of their popularity. Instead, a few suggestions for their apparent popularity have been made. The focus, in both cases, has been on a small section of a larger corpus of work. Lewis was a prolific writer of popular theology, children's books and some scholarly works.¹⁵³ Wright was also a frequent preacher, speaker, writer and editor.¹⁵⁴ For Lewis, broadcasting was a small part of his work, for Wright it was a significant, but by no means the only element. In the midst of the confusion of the Second World War, Lewis was a confident academic apologist for Christianity attempting to decode theology for his radio audiences, whilst Wright was primarily a pastor who used simple and unambiguous verbal pictures to re-awaken or reinforce his listeners' faith.¹⁵⁵ Behind these analyses has been the issue of insights to be gained from radio broadcasters by homileticians.

Before attempting to identify specific lessons for preachers from the radio broadcasting practices of Wright and Lewis, however, it is important to highlight the considerable gap between communicating effectively in a studio in the 1940s and doing so in a pulpit in the 1990s. During the Second World War, radio broadcasting had a distinct advantage over many other forms of communication. Wright admits that part of the reason for his popularity, and this almost certainly applies to Lewis as well, was that:

¹⁵³ See Lyle W. Dorsett, "Researching C.S. Lewis" in Andrew Walker and James Patrick, editors, *A Christian For All Christians*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990.

¹⁵⁴ Wright edited the *Scottish Forces Bulletin* during the war. "The Church of Scotland had a supplement for the Scottish forces and they asked me to take it up. I made it into a kind of booklet. It came out originally every month and was like a little magazine. I put in anything I like. I did that for a long time, for several years." R.S. Wright, interviewed by Rev. David G. Coulter, 28th October, 1993, at Queens House, Edinburgh, second tape, p.11 of transcript.

¹⁵⁵ This may further explain Wright's unease about being used to communicate coded messages.

people had nothing else to do. There was a blackout and people didn't go out, they didn't go to the pictures, they didn't go to the theatre and for long periods they just had to sit at home and so they listened to the radio.¹⁵⁶

Wright and Lewis had a potentially “captive audience”. Nevertheless, given the substantial amount of mail that they both received it was clear that they successfully engaged many of their listeners. One of the key arguments of this chapter is that part of the reason for their success was their use of conversational discourse or “real talk” as Lewis describes it, and their creation of pictures with words which had the potential to engage their listeners’ imaginations.

It is debatable whether, if Wright or Lewis attempted to repeat their broadcasts today or replicate their approaches in a pulpit, they would hold many listeners’ attention. In other words, it would be nonsensical to hold them up as speakers to mimic or emulate in our highly competitive communicative environment in the 1990s. On one level, as A.N. Wilson asserts about Lewis, both of their approaches are dated, and even for their times their broadcasts are far from flawless.¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, my contention is that there are three primary principles to draw out from their practice which will translate into our different cultural and communicative context. They can be summarised in three simple words: knowledge, conversation and engagement.

First, knowledge: one of the marks of Wright’s work was that he made a considerable effort to know his listeners. It was obviously impossible to meet them all, but travelling round the country ensured that he developed a strong sense of the difficulties and fears that many of his listeners were facing. Lewis was not such a prolific traveller, but many of his analogies draw on his travels in the imagination into other people’s worlds. Preachers who withdraw from the world into the safety of their study or ecclesiastical community, and fail to understand their listeners’ world

¹⁵⁶ R.S. Wright, Imperial War Museum Interview with R.S. Wright. Transcript with D. Coulter, p.4.

¹⁵⁷ For examples of critics supporting this point see: W.E. William’s critique of Wright (n.17 of this chapter) and Humphrey Carpenter’s evaluation of Lewis (text linked to n.107 of this chapter). These negative points also serve as reminders to preachers of the importance of tone of voice, manner of delivery and appropriate content.

their study or ecclesiastical community, and fail to understand their listeners' world are in danger of not being heard. That is one reason why it was argued so strongly in the previous chapter that preachers should engage critically with our communicative environment. It is another way of knowing your listeners.

Secondly, conversation: Wright and Lewis developed a conversational style of speaking on the radio, which allowed the listener to feel they were being spoken to directly. Both attempted to create a sense of real conversation between themselves and their listeners. Rarely, however, did they "wear their heart on their sleeves", and make themselves vulnerable to their listeners. The obvious exception can be seen in Wright's talk on the death of Jimmy Dalglish, but even in this case, the grief is to be inferred rather than made explicit. The result of such an approach is that whilst Wright and Lewis employ a conversational style of speaking, they also maintain a sense of distance from their audience. This in turn can lead them at times to sounding over-confident, authoritative or even magisterial in their broadcast talk. It will be argued in the following chapter that this provides a sharp contrast with the work of contemporary broadcasters. In today's environment where congregations have been conditioned to receive messages in a conversational form, speakers can learn from these early examples of broadcasters who did not write literary pieces, but attempted to create "real talk".

Thirdly, engagement: Wright and Lewis recognised the intrinsic and potential power of radio for involving the listener more actively in the communication process. In different ways they both attempted to connect with their listeners through a variety of easily accessible images, pictures and stories. The pictures they themselves engaged with and used also reflects a little of their own characters. Wright, the army chaplain, in his own words may not have been a "deep theologian", but one of his great skills was to observe scenes and replicate them verbally, thereby creating a picture which had the potential to resonate with his audience's experiences. He also would happily adapt other communicators' images or pictures to fit in with his own rhetorical objectives. Lewis, the academic, demonstrates a greater precision with his pictorial

language, sometimes refining his analogy a number of times before using it. Topical, shocking or approximate pictures were used not only to engage his listeners, but also to lead them further into an alternative view of reality. Preachers seeking to be heard today can learn much from Wright's and Lewis' attempts to engage with their listeners through painting pictures with words.

Further pointers for preachers seeking to communicate effectively today will be identified in the following two chapters and in the conclusion of this thesis. In the next chapter, three more British broadcasters operating in our contemporary communicative environment will be considered. They will provide some evidence which contrasts with this chapter and therefore offer further useful insights for preachers hoping to connect with their listeners today.

Chapter 5. Lessons from the Present: *Thought for the Day*

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter it was suggested that preachers can learn from the practices of certain religious radio broadcasters who were operating during the Second World War. In this chapter it will be argued that preachers can also learn from the work of various present day religious radio broadcasters. In the last chapter it was proposed that R.S. Wright and C.S. Lewis' attempts to step into the listeners' world, their use of a conversational style of speaking, and their employment of verbal pictures represent three important lessons for preachers. These insights will be explored in greater detail in this fifth chapter. More specifically it will be asserted that pictorial language is a significant element in at least **one** strand of religious broadcasting. As a test for this contention, the approaches taken by three of the regular contributors to BBC Radio 4's *Thought for the Day* will be analysed. On the basis of these discussions a number of lessons for homiletics will be identified in the conclusion. At the heart of this chapter is a discussion built around three experienced and respected broadcasters: Angela Tilby, Lionel Blue and David Winter. In each case, their own theoretical insights about broadcasting will be the foundation upon which a detailed consideration of some of their *Thoughts for the Day* will take place.

One of the underlying aims of this chapter is to argue that pictorial language has the potential to build a connection or bridge between the broadcasters' theologically informed world views and many of the listeners' more secular and everyday modes of discourse. On the basis of this argument it will be suggested that preachers can also learn from the use of this bridging device. This case will be made more explicit in the conclusion to the chapter.

In order to prepare the ground for considering how this oral bridge-building is undertaken some of the influences that have acted upon these three religious broadcasters will be considered. The central aim of the brief introductory part of the chapter, therefore, is to locate their oral discourse within its particular broadcasting

and cultural context. It will illustrate how *Thought for the Day* represents a very different form of religious broadcasting compared to Lewis' radio apologetics and Wright's pastoral radio ministry in the 1940s. This contextualising will contribute towards a more sensitive reading of these particular broadcasters' use of pictorial language as a tool for extending the field of discourse of their listeners.¹

i. "*Thought for the Day*" in Context

Religious radio is one of the most elusive animals in the U.K.'s "mass media jungle". It is often hard to catch sight or sound of it lurking on the periphery of the media. Some sceptics, therefore, say it is "hanging on by its fingernails",² on the edge of extinction. Other critics view it as a "peculiar animal", which sits "uneasily beside the analytical news and current affairs coverage".³ Unlike in the U.S.A., where religious broadcasting on the radio is by no means an "endangered species",⁴ rare ventures such as London's recently opened Christian radio station, Premier Radio, have struggled to establish themselves.⁵ In short, religious radio, as it now operates within the U.K.'s public, commercial and community spheres of broadcasting,⁶ is perceived

¹ "Field of Discourse" is used here in a generalist sense, meaning: Those sets of concepts, images, analogies and metaphors which are employed for living life and making sense of it. This definition draws on, but is not constrained by Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, London: Edward Arnold, 1995. See Chapter 4: "Critical Analysis of Media Discourse" and p.76ff "Discourse Types".

² Gillian Reynolds, "Opportunities and Responsibilities", lecture at the Local Broadcasting Conference, Swanwick, 20-22 June, 1994. (Organised by Churches Advisory Council for Local Broadcasting.) This pessimistic description gains further credence following a careful analysis of the proposed changes to religious programming on Radio 4. See: *The Guardian*, p.3, *The Independent*, p.3, *The Daily Telegraph*, p.4, Thursday 31 July 1997.

³ Polly Toynbee, "From Where I Stand", *The Independent*, 25 July 1995, Section 2, p.17. Polly Toynbee was reflecting specifically on "the BBC's policy on religious broadcasting". She argues "What a peculiar animal it is, sitting uneasily beside the analytical news and current affairs coverage."

⁴ See: Mark Ward, editor, *National Religious Broadcasters Directory of Religious Media*, Manassas, Virginia: National Religious Broadcasters, 1994. This is a positive, optimistic reading of religious broadcasting in the USA from a conservative evangelical view-point.

⁵ See: *The Independent*, 18 June, 1996, Section 2, p.16 for a report underlining its insecure position. A more positive recent report is to be found in *The Church of England Newspaper*, 4 April, 1997. "The financial difficulties which hindered the progress of the London-based Premier Radio, Britain's first Christian radio station, have been halted and the future looks more secure every month, say station managers. The station, not yet two years old, has struggled from the outset and just six months after its launch was forced into a big shake-up that saw it shed editorial staff and resort to more music because of financial difficulties." p.4.

⁶ Peter Lewis and Jerry Booth, *The Invisible Medium - Public, Commercial and Community Radio*, London: MacMillan, 1989. Lewis and Booth examine the three models of radio in this text.

by some critics to be fighting for survival in an increasingly competitive and secular radio market-place.

This chapter focuses on one particular example of religious broadcasting which some also see as struggling for survival. It regularly provokes debate over its contributors, its content and its future.⁷ *Thought for the Day* is to be found on BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme at approximately 7.48am on Monday to Saturday. Its situation, embedded in a fast-paced current affairs programme, ensures that its contributors are speaking alongside some highly skilled broadcasters. *Thought for the Day*, commonly referred to by the *Today* staff as *Thought*, is normally preceded by a summary of today's "papers", a package illustrated by short clips and actuality, and is then followed by an interview, the weather-forecast and trails for some of the day's programmes. The "pips" and the 8am News which follow, like the "weather" and trails, simply cannot be "crashed", so time is strictly limited. This is a highly competitive and time-conscious broadcasting environment, where listeners are presented with a series of distinctive stimuli. Contributors on *Thought* cannot therefore assume an attentive audience.

Some critics, such as Polly Toynbee, argue that it is out of place in *Today*: "We get a warm soup of unctuous "Thoughts" that jar oddly with the brisk tones of the *Today* programme."⁸ Others commentators are more positive. Paul Donovan, for example, argues that *Thought* "is an invaluable daily reminder of transcendence", though he balances this affirmation with the comment that: "although the slot has an influence

⁷ Recent debates have centred on: Anne Atkins' broadcast on homosexuality, (see Polly Toynbee, "Give us hellfire, not opiate, in the God slot", *The Independent*, 14 October, 1996, p.15.); or Gabrielle Cox's politically biased *Thought*, (see "Thought for the Day: Don't let Lefties lecture", *Daily Mail*, 28 August, 1996); or the exclusion of atheists and agnostics on *Thought* (see n. 24 of this chapter).

⁸ Polly Toynbee, *ibid.*, p.15. In this entertaining article she provocatively argues: "You know something is wrong from the moment they start to speak. Sometimes they are perky and facetious, sometimes they ooze with improper social concern for the Bosnians or the homeless. Even when it is a Sikh, you do not get the authentic tones of the rebels besieged in the Golden Temple, the fanatics who shot Indira Gandhi. You get a soft-voiced gentle soul who may carry a dirk in his turban, but sounds as if he, too, has been through a C of E theological college. This is a conspiracy of the religions to present themselves as agreeable, reasonable people, despite the mayhem religion causes wherever in the world people actually believe in it."

out of all proportion to its length..... it alienates as well as attracts".⁹ The journalist, James Fenton, is one listener who has clearly been alienated; writing in *The Independent*, he claims:

I want a radio with a *Thought-for-the-Day* inhibitor, a radio that will turn down the volume automatically at the first mention of their god-slot, but which will monitor the silent broadcast and turn the volume up again as soon as the voice says, "That was *Thought for the Day*." I want a radio with a bishop-filter, a cardinal-canceller, a vicar's voice-vanisher, a radio programmed to replace these two minutes of tosh with some item from the repertoire of short piano pieces.¹⁰

Such comments suggest that at least part of the audience are not exactly sitting on the edge of their beds, anxious to hear the next *Thought*.

As a "God Slot",¹¹ *Thought* may be a soft target for commentators' criticisms, but even the majority of listeners who do not reach for the "off dial" are likely to be preparing to leave the house, eating breakfast, in the bathroom, snoozing in bed or en route to work. In short, they are involved in other activities. Moreover as David Coomes, the BBC's series producer responsible for *Thought*, highlights:

Contributors have to accept that this is a Radio 4 audience which means it's not particularly young, and it's quite conservative, but they are able to think very deeply, and they are able to reflect, and they are able to appreciate clever thoughts and ironic thoughts and humorous thoughts.....¹²

The picture emerges of an intelligent and critical audience, who are likely to be engaged in a secondary activity whilst listening. It is not surprising, therefore, that

⁹ Radio critic Paul Donovan cites BBC audience research into the 7.30am-8am section of the programme in April 1994: "Thought for the Day was something that nearly a fifth of the Today audience did not want to hear." Paul Donovan, "No more holy than thou", Radio Waves Column, *The Times*, 14 July, 1996.

¹⁰ James Fenton, "Thought for the day: dispense with bishops", *The Independent*, 13 March 1995.

¹¹ The "God Slot" is a common way of describing *Thought*. See, for example, Diana Pulson's story on: "'God Slot' Rabbi's Revelation" in *The Liverpool Echo*, 7 October, 1995.

¹² David Coomes, Private Recorded Interview with Jolyon Mitchell at Broadcasting House, 19 December, 1996. (Hereafter referred to as: David Coomes, Recorded Interview 19 Dec., 1996.) "I have looked after *Thought* for the last three years or so." Before being in charge he was one of several producers who were responsible for producing it.

contributors use different devices to attempt to gain, win and then hold their listeners' attention. One of the devices employed by some broadcasters, and which can contribute to the humour, irony and wit of a *Thought*, is the attempt to create pictures with words. Pictorial language is by no means a new tool for broadcasters. As it has been demonstrated in earlier chapters it has been used on the BBC since the earliest days of radio.¹³

This section will continue with an analysis of the various factors that make it a useful tool for retention and development by those attempting to do *Thought*. Two factors will be focused on in particular: first, certain transformations in religious broadcasting, and secondly, what could be described as "the erasure of the name of God" from public discourse.

ii. Transformations in Religious Broadcasting

The early story of religious radio has been comprehensively retold elsewhere.¹⁴ Religion on the radio is almost as old as radio itself, and is therefore inextricably linked with the history of broadcasting.¹⁵ The past 60 years have seen a number of significant general shifts within religious radio: First, the move away from the Reithian ideal of proclaiming a "thoroughgoing, optimistic and manly"¹⁶ Christianity towards a more secular Birtian style "mission to explain".¹⁷ Secondly, the development from "mainstream" Christian Broadcasting to "multi-faith" Religious

¹³ See Chapter 2 of this thesis, and in particular section 3 v. on Dimbleby and Murrow.

¹⁴ Kenneth Wolfe, *The Churches and the British Broadcasting Corporation, 1922-1956*. London: SCM, 1984. David Winter, editor, *The Church of the Air - Celebrating 60 Years of BBC Radio's Daily Service*, London: Marshall Pickering, 1988.

¹⁵ See Chapter 1 pp.3-17 of Wolfe's useful text (cited above) and Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, Oxford: OUP, 1961,65,70 and 1979 (Four Volumes). See especially volume 1 "*The Birth of Broadcasting*".

¹⁶ John Reith, *Broadcast Over Britain*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1924. pp.191-2, 4.

¹⁷ This phrase "mission to explain" originates from a series of articles written by John Birt (current BBC Director General) and Peter Jay (current BBC TV Economics Editor) in the 1970s on a "bias against understanding", which they believed to characterize television news and current affairs." See John Eldridge, editor, *Getting the Message - News, Truth and Power*, London: Routledge, 1993. p.5.

Broadcasting.¹⁸ The idea that public service religious radio was an extension of the churches, and had an evangelistic function, was firmly rejected by the BBC in the 1970s.¹⁹ Thirdly, the erosion of the protected “God Slots” on both national and local stations.²⁰ Fourthly, the reduction in air-time given for religious broadcasting. Contrast for example the regular ten to fifteen minute religious talks considered in the last chapter with the slots for *Thought for the Day* in 1996 lasting under three minutes. Admittedly, the style of radio broadcasting has changed so that “straight” talks, as opposed to readings, lasting more than three minutes are now a rarity.²¹ The Reith Lectures, for instance, traditionally a single voice speaking, now occasionally use sound effects to illustrate the spoken discourse.²² Nevertheless, even taking this stylistic shift into account, there has also been a sharp drop in the amount of time specifically assigned to religious broadcasting.

The implications of some of the more recent developments outlined above have received little attention from scholars.²³ The moves have, however, made a considerable impact on contributors to *Thought for the Day*. First, there is no question of proselytising.²⁴ This is a contrasting point to the philosophy espoused by Melville Dinwiddie, a former director and controller of BBC Scotland, in *Religion by*

¹⁸ Ove Ingvaldstad, *Concepts of Religious Broadcasting in BBC Radio, 1922 - 1987*, (Unpublished thesis, English Department, University of Trondheim, Spring, 1989) See pp.7-8 for discussion of “mainstream” religious broadcasting and pp.80-81 for “from Christian to religious”.

¹⁹ John Lang (Head of BBC Religious Broadcasting from 1970) argued that religious broadcasting “is not the arm of the Christian churches in broadcasting and it does not, as a department, have an evangelistic function”. In an unpublished internal document “The Role of Religious Broadcasting in the BBC” 1975, p.1.

²⁰ Gillian Reynolds’ case that “religious broadcasting is hanging on by its finger-nails” (see n.2) was supported by a number of examples from Radio 4. *Seeds of Faith* (Radio 4) has been reduced by 15 minutes, *The Daily Service* (Radio 4) has been marginalised to Long Wave, and *Morning Worship* (Sundays, Radio 4) is sometimes reduced by 15 minutes to make room for Test Match coverage. Note also how James Boyle, the controller of Radio 4, proposes to cut *Ten to Ten* from the schedule, as well as bring *Prayer for the Day* and *Sunday* forward to earlier and less popular listening times.

²¹ *Letter from America* with Alistair Cooke is the outstanding example of a regular 15 minute talk.

²² See, for example, Jean Aitchison, Reith Lectures, BBC Radio 4, 1996.

²³ Peter Elvy in his unpublished Ph.D. touches on some of these developments. See Peter Elvy, *Broadcasting Evangelical Christianity - A Critical Comparison of Britain and Hungary, 1989-1993*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Unpublished Ph.D., 1995. Especially Appendix 1, “The Future of Independent Christian Broadcasting” an address by Peter Meadows, 22 Feb. 1994, pp.307-308. Meadows highlights the shift in the BBC’s religious broadcasting policy philosophy by comparing a paper by Rev. Francis House in 1948 and CRAC’s submission to the Annan Committee in 1975.

²⁴ “The one thing you just cannot do is proselytise”. D. Coomes, Recorded Interview, 19 Dec., 1996.

Radio, where he devotes an entire chapter to "Radio Evangelism".²⁵ Secondly, contributors to *Thought* are by no means exclusively Christian and no speakers are allowed to challenge other faith traditions.²⁶ After a recent internal review, agnostics and atheists are still not given access to broadcast on *Thought*.²⁷ Thirdly, as suggested above, this is but one short "slot" which like other "God slots" faces competition. Fourthly, *Thought* has recently been repeatedly cut down in length, now lasting only two minutes and forty-five seconds. David Coomes, in a private interview, highlighted how it has been reduced from five minutes, to four and half minutes, then three and half minutes and now under 3 minutes. He believes that "it has become much sharper, and tighter and has benefited for being shorter."²⁸

For Paul Donovan, however, this brevity causes problems:

The real problem with *Thought for the Day*, whoever delivers it, is that at two-and-a-half minutes, [2 minutes 45 seconds is correct length] it is too long to be just one thought but far too short to be a properly reasoned essay.²⁹

Fifthly, the style and content of *Thought* has altered since the 1970s:

²⁵ Melville Dinwiddie, *Religion by Radio*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968, pp.92-103. The underlying assumption of Dinwiddie's eighth chapter is that a legitimate use of religious radio is for evangelism. He does however emphasise the importance of caution in this area: "before the microphone could be used to bring in the lapsed and lost, some hard thinking and bold experiment was necessary to determine the target and the scope of radio evangelism." p.95.

²⁶ "New voices soon to be heard [on *Thought*] include those of Akhandadhi Das, the principal of the Hindu establishment Bhaktivedanta Manor in Hertfordshire, and Clive Lawton, employed by the Chief Rabbi on Jewish renewal," and the Islamic educationalist: "Nadeem Kazmi". Paul Donovan, "No more holy than thou", Radio Waves Column, *The Times*, 14 July, 1996. An unnamed report in the *Daily Mail* a month earlier had asserted: "Radio Four's *Thought for the Day* was under attack yesterday for handing a platform to the Hare Krishna religious sect". *Daily Mail*, 12 June, 1996.

²⁷ This controversy was covered extensively in the press. See, for example, "Radio 4 'God slot' to keep the faith", *The Times*, 14 April 1995; "BBC keeps faith with listeners", *Daily Telegraph*, 14 April 1995; "Radio slot closed to atheists", *Guardian*, 14 April 1995; "Radio God Slot ban on atheists", *Daily Express*, 15 April 1995. In all of these articles the BBC's Head of Religious Broadcasting, Rev. Ernest Rea, is cited: "*Thought for the Day* is there to give a distinctiveness and to throw a different light on news events. If you secularise it then you dilute that special perspective."

²⁸ David Coomes, Recorded Interview 19 Dec., 1996.

²⁹ Donovan ironically continues: "That is the real reason why theology and hard, uncompromising thinking get left on the back burner - that, and the desire not to upset people too much before the weather forecast, the proper digestion of whose meteorological details calls for a calm and uncluttered mind." Paul Donovan, "No more holy than thou", Radio Waves Column, *The Times*, 14 July, 1996.

The slot has changed a lot..... it used to be much more pious. So also has the *Today* sequence, it was much more varied, you had "Keep fit with Eileen Fowler"..... and much more magazine-type items on. And it's now very hard news. So what *Thought* stands for has shifted quite heavily.³⁰

This stylistic shift has also been influenced by changes in both the contributors and producers of *Thought*. Originally BBC religious radio was dominated by clerics who had turned to broadcasting. They have been replaced by professional broadcasters, who have specialised in religion.

This has inevitably had consequences for the editorial direction upon *Thought*. David Coomes, a newspaper journalist before joining the BBC, is clear about what he is looking for in a contributor:

someone who can think theologically, someone who will represent a particular religious perspective, because you know we try and fulfil balances of denomination and religion and male and female, and so on..... And you want someone who can actually engage with a *Today* audience at ten to eight in the morning and not sound completely out on a limb, who doesn't sound pious, *who doesn't sound like a vicar delivering a sermon*.³¹

The controversial "resting" in 1996 of seven "white, male, Christian and ordained priests",³² who used to contribute to *Thought*, can also be interpreted as a further move away from the traditionally clerically dominated air-waves.³³ This represents another example of what Steve Bruce has described as the BBC's "necessary accommodation to pluralism".³⁴

³⁰ Angela Tilby, Private Recorded Interview with Jolyon Mitchell, St. Albans, 16 July, 1996.

³¹ David Coomes, Recorded Interview 19 Dec., 1996. (*Italics are mine*). He continues: "And who has something ideally provocative to say, and I suppose takes something that can be quite ordinary and something that's being covered a lot in the *Today* programme and just give it a tweak and look at something from a different perspective, you know, without being pious....."

³² Paul Donovan, "No more holy than thou", Radio Waves Column, *The Times*, 14 July, 1996.

³³ David Coomes, Recorded Interview 19 Dec., 1996. "We have 30 contributors to *Thought* at the moment, and probably I'm going to build that up to about 40." He explains why he rested the seven contributors: "the basic reason, absolutely, the truthful reason was I wanted to bring in some new names, a bit of new blood, and slowly shift things around a bit."

³⁴ Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World*, Oxford: OUP, 1996, pp.76-77. He details how the BBC now employs staff from a range of different denominations and religious traditions.

iii. *The Erasure of the Name of "God" from Public Discourse*

It is beyond the parameters of this discussion to consider the transformations to *Thought* and its broadcasting context in detail. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that compared to war-time broadcasters such as R.S. Wright and C.S. Lewis in the 1940s, those doing *Thought* now face new pressures as they operate in an increasingly secular context where faith is often privatised and some argue that "agnostic pluralism reigns".³⁵ In Paul Donovan's eyes this is reflected in the BBC, where he believes that "liberal humanism" is and has been the "dominant force ever since Hugh Carleton Greene became its director-general in the 1960s."³⁶

This has serious theological implications for broadcasters. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, for example, believes that one of the characteristics of our culture is that "we no longer need, nor would we even think of invoking, God in order to understand nature or history".³⁷ This point is supported by the broadcaster Angela Tilby. She argues that it is important on *Thought* "to remember the word 'God' " and to be prepared to "open a window on the transcendence of God." She perceives that there is sometimes now "pressure to turn it into a nice little talk about morality" or allow it to become "an opinion piece" which is "not offensive to agnostics." She believes this pressure is part of the process at the moment, where "the name of God is being erased from public speech".³⁸

On this basis it could be argued that *Thought*, along with other religious radio, is now operating within what Old Testament theologian, Walter Brueggemann, describes as a "new interpretative situation".³⁹ One element of this new situation has been

³⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *Truth to Tell - The Gospel as Public Truth*, London: SPCK, 1991. p.60.

³⁶ Paul Donovan, "No more holy than thou", Radio Waves Column, *The Times*, 14 July, 1996.

³⁷ Jonathan Sacks, *The Persistence of Faith - Religion, Morality and Society in a Secular Age*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991. p.27.

³⁸ Angela Tilby, Private Recorded Interview with Jolyon Mitchell, St. Albans, 16 July, 1996. See following chapter for the contrasting experience in the U.S.A., where the name of "God" is still regularly to be found in public discourse.

³⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible and Postmodern Imagination - Texts Under Negotiation*, London: SCM, 1993. p.vii. "There can be little doubt that we are in a wholly new interpretative situation".

characterised by the sole independent MP and former BBC foreign correspondent, Martin Bell. He argues that we have become an “unled people”, who now look “for leadership in ourselves”.⁴⁰ This memorable phrase reflects the belief that there is now a new moral order in which many individuals appear to construct their own “moral universe”,⁴¹ without reference to God.

Public service religious radio, and perhaps *Thought* contributors, are under considerable implicit pressure to reflect this type of world view, where the “name of God is being erased”, and many construct their own “moral universe”. Given this context, the Reithian model of religious broadcasting appears no longer to be viable. Listeners to *Thought* cannot be perceived as resembling HMV’s single dog peering into a large megaphone, listening intently to “his master’s voice”. Such a model has little place in an inter-active multi-media environment, where consumer choice apparently rules. Pluralism of moral beliefs and religious expression have become part of what is sometimes described as the post-modern condition.⁴² Whatever title it is ascribed, this environment or condition ensures that the picture of a single voice authoritatively booming out of the wireless is a redundant one for contributors to *Thought*. Likewise, as argued in the first chapter of this thesis, a single voice authoritatively booming from the pulpit is equally likely to be a failure in communication.

Few assumptions can now be made about listeners’ belief systems. On these grounds any religious communication strategy must take seriously the diversity of belief or absence of faith. It cannot ignore the fact that “the listener” is, according to the radio critic Tom Gardiner, “often more secularised than the religious communicator”.⁴³ Moreover, the transformations in religious broadcasting and in public discourse in the U.K. underline how this particular species of broadcasting must continue to develop

⁴⁰ Martin Bell, when he was still a BBC Foreign News Correspondent, *The TVYP Lecture*, Edinburgh International Television Festival, 25 August 1996.

⁴¹ Woody Allen, [Film], *Bullets Over Broadway*, 1995. A frequent refrain in this film, written and directed by Woody Allen, was that “the artist creates his own moral universe”.

⁴² See: David Lyon, *Postmodernity*, Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989; and Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition, A Report on Knowledge*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.

⁴³ Tom Gardiner, on “Songs in Space” in *The Church Times*’ radio review, 29 September 1995.

approaches which allow speakers and listeners, often from contrasting faith-worlds, at least to understand their divergent fields of discourse.⁴⁴

In other words, there is a need to employ forms of discourse that enable those who are experienced in the theological modes of discourse and who perceive themselves inhabiting a particular “realm of meaning”⁴⁵ to communicate with those for whom such discourse is at best incomprehensible and at worst irrelevant, meaningless or even offensive.⁴⁶ One of the contentions of this thesis is that pictorial language skilfully used on the radio and in the pulpit can help bring together divergent fields of discourse.

In many mediated contexts the name of God may have been erased, but in the religious broadcasters’ and preachers’ fields the name of God still has a significant part to play. It is clear, however, that this absence is not rectified by endless repetition of the name of God. The American sociologist, Robert Wuthnow argues:

Religious discourse in the public arena is not simply talk about the gods in an otherwise secular context. It is the use of a certain rhetorical style.....⁴⁷

Wuthnow believes that this “rhetorical style” is based on “appropriate structural rules”. Religious broadcasters who attempt to make pictures with words are

⁴⁴ This challenge is found in a heightened form in the BBC World Service. See, for example, how the English religious current affairs programme *Focus on Faith*, soon to change its title to *Report on Religion*, attempts to present weekly religious news to an internationally diverse audience.

⁴⁵ P.H. Phenix, “Realms of Meaning” (1964) in Michael Golby, Jane Greenwald and Ruth West, editors, *Curriculum Design*, London: Croom Helm, 1975, pp.165-173. “Human beings are essentially creatures who have the power to experience *meanings*. Distinctively human existence consists in a pattern of meanings.” p.167. Phenix’s understanding of the object of general education could be usefully adapted to highlight one of the objectives for *Thought for the Day*: “To lead to the fulfilment of human life through the enlargement and deepening of meaning.” p.167.

⁴⁶ This argument resonates with Hans-Georg Gadamer’s understanding of the “fusing of horizons” in hermeneutics. See: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Second Edition, London: Sheed and Ward, 1979 (1965). “In the process of understanding there takes place a real fusing of horizons”. p.273. See also: Anthony Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980, and Van A. Harvey’s useful essay on “Hermeneutics”, in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, M. Eliade, editor, Volume 6, Macmillan: New York, 1987. He suggests, echoing Wittgenstein and Heidegger, that: “Exploration and interpretation make sense only within a horizon of presuppositions, practices and assumptions that our culture mediates to us - our tradition so to speak.” p.285.

⁴⁷ Robert Wuthnow, *Rediscovering the Sacred - Perspectives on Religion in Contemporary Society*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1992, p.81.

employing a particular “rhetorical style”. For them the absence of visual images on radio is a potential strength, not weakness. It can involve the listener more actively in the communication process, and so prevent the naming of God becoming a distant or easily caricatured act.

As Robert Runcie, the former Archbishop of Canterbury and Chair of C.R.A.C.,⁴⁸ argued:

Radio is particularly evocative..... since the absence of images gives space for listeners to form and develop their own.....⁴⁹

The evocative and open-ended potential of radio allows listeners to recreate images in their own minds which connect with their own “realm of meaning”, rather than be constricted or limited by some of the electronic audio-visual stereotypes discussed in Chapter 3.

The mass media, as Runcie suggests in the same address, makes an impact on a “person’s world-view”⁵⁰ and the formation of an “artificial memory”. Runcie provocatively defines the “artificial memory” as a “collection of events and experiences which never actually happened directly to the viewer or listener, but which he [sic] shared in vicariously, and can recall because they appeared in the broadcast media.”⁵¹ We now turn, therefore, to consider how some actual contributors to *Thought* - Tilby, Blue and Winter - draw on, and even counter, this “artificial memory” and create an alternative set of pictures to engage the imagination.

⁴⁸ Robert Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury between 1980-1991 was Chair of C.R.A.C. (The Central Religious Advisory Committee) between 1973-1979. For details on C.R.A.C. see Kenneth Wolfe, *The Churches and the BBC 1922-1956*, London: SCM, 1984. The historian Adrian Hastings writes that Runcie had a “wide range of experience”, and this showed in the “confidence” with “which he handled the media.” Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-1985*, London: Fount Paperbacks, 1987 (1986), pp.612-613.

⁴⁹ Robert Runcie, *Religious Broadcasting Today*, University of Kent at Canterbury: Centre for the Study of Religion and Society: 1986, p.17. Runcie continues: “I would wish to encourage variety and experiment based on an awareness of the inevitable limitations of broadcasting as a means of apprehending the holy and transcendent.”

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.3.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.6.

2. *The Radio Iconographer - Angela Tilby*

Radio taught me about preaching first because I did some broadcasting in my twenties. The discipline of having to think about every word, cut out the superfluous, *to use images, pictures and stories*, that was a huge, huge benefit when I first started as a lay reader to preach sermons; because I never ever took for granted that anybody wanted to listen to me at all..... in fact rather the reverse.⁵²

Angela Tilby's use of "images, pictures and stories" provides useful evidence by which to test the case that pictorial language has a significant role to play in religious broadcasting today. In order further to probe such a claim, this section will first consider Angela Tilby's general work as a broadcaster. Secondly, it will examine her theoretical understanding of the art of radio broadcasting and thirdly several extracts from some of her *Thoughts for the Day* will be discussed in detail. Fourthly, it will be argued that whilst pictorial language plays an important role in her broadcasting, it is by no means the only device she employs.

i. Tilby as Broadcaster

Angela Tilby is an experienced radio broadcaster and television producer who has worked for the BBC since she joined in 1973.⁵³ She feels she has had a "long relationship" with *Thought for the Day*, because one of her first tasks as a producer in the mid-seventies was to produce it. Now as a regular contributor to *Thought*, she is herself produced:

I work as a colleague along with colleagues who actually produce me..... it's a good experience to be produced because you realise what dreadful things you put other people through..... If they're tough and revolting it reminds me I quite often am too, [laughing] so it's a kind of penitential experience for me.⁵⁴

⁵² Angela Tilby, Private Recorded Interview with Jolyon Mitchell, St. Albans, 16 July, 1996. *Italics* mine. (Hereafter referred to as: Angela Tilby, Recorded Interview, July 1996.)

⁵³ She has recently taken early retirement from the BBC, and was ordained deacon in June 1997. She will become a lecturer in Spirituality for two-thirds of the year at Westcott House, Cambridge from the Autumn of 1997. For the remaining third she will be making programmes as a freelance producer.

⁵⁴ Angela Tilby, Recorded Interview, July 1996.

This dry remark provides a contrast to C.S. Lewis' description of broadcasting as his Procrustean bed.⁵⁵ Unlike Lewis, Tilby is a broadcasting professional, well-versed in the world of microphones and television documentaries. She has produced numerous episodes of *Everyman* and *Horizon* for the BBC. Topics ranged from: Anorexia, the Survival of the Soul and a four-part documentary with Mark Tully on *Lives of Jesus*.⁵⁶ Interestingly, she does not see any obvious links between her work as a TV producer and her radio broadcasting. She even believes that the two media "rather fight each other", since television "is so much about the immediate emotional impact", as opposed to radio which depends more on words and painting "pictures in people's minds".⁵⁷ Self-effacing about her skills as a television producer and director, Tilby considers herself to be "much more of a word person, a writer, and a hearer of words" who does not have "very much visual sense"⁵⁸:

I don't think I've got that sort of brilliant streak of just being able to see in my mind something from scratch..... I admire people who have that huge gift.⁵⁹

In short, she does not perceive herself as able to create scenes in her imagination "ex nihilo", she relies instead upon a more creative response to what is happening on the ground when she arrives to film. Assuming that self-assessment is accurate, it raises a question about what Tilby draws upon for her word pictures. The three-fold answer she gives illuminates much of her work as a radio broadcaster.

First, she is a self-confessed introvert who is dependent on her memory:

Like living in a rich and fertile forest out of which you take the bits that will shine or work or make sense out there.....[my] inner life is

⁵⁵ See Chapter 4 section 3 of this thesis on C.S. Lewis. (Procrustean bed reference is on p.173.)

⁵⁶ Mark Tully, Presenter, *Lives of Jesus*, devised by Angela Tilby, BBC 1, December 1996. See also: Mark Tully, *An Investigation into the Lives of Jesus: God, Jew, Rebel, The Hidden Jesus*, London: BBC Books, 1996.

⁵⁷ Angela Tilby, Recorded Interview, July 1996.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, on the basis of viewing a number of Tilby documentaries, she appears to be being more than a little self-effacing. For example, the visually imaginative juxtaposition of desert shots with Mark Tully walking up the mountain in the final episode of *Lives of Jesus* created a number of memorable scenes for this final programme in the series. BBC 1, December 1996.

⁵⁹ Angela Tilby, Recorded Interview, July 1996.

made up of all sorts of things..... TV programmes, old films, places been to, [all of which is] somehow recorded.⁶⁰

This memorable picture explains both the rich diversity of her imagination and the ease with which she moves in and out of pictorial language. It provides an extension of Runcie's idea of the "artificial memory", cited earlier, as her *Thoughts* often also draw on specific personal memories.⁶¹

Secondly, her theological understanding finds its roots in pictures rather than abstract concepts. She admits that she is not:

.....a good philosopher, which means I don't understand theology through a series of flow charts, of highly logical constructs which are somehow not clothed with pictures. I don't think you can do anything without pictures.⁶²

Tilby finds support for her approach from a theologian "from North Africa"⁶³ born in the fourth century, who was himself a highly skilled word-artist:⁶⁴

Augustine..... made it quite clear [that he] couldn't envisage God without mental imagery.⁶⁵ He just had no capacity to think of God in abstract, and I think that's true for me as well. I do conjure up images..... even though I know all images are inadequate.⁶⁶

This inability "to think of God in the abstract" may partially explain why she found biblical Hebrew so alluring. She finds that: "Hebrew is very rich and it works on

⁶⁰ Angela Tilby, Recorded Interview, July 1996.

⁶¹ See: Angela Tilby, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today* BBC Radio 4, 16 July 1996 (school assemblies), 27 May 1996 (Mount Sinai) or 13 May 1996 ("I remember sitting on my own with a book").

⁶² Angela Tilby, Recorded Interview, July 1996.

⁶³ Angela Tilby, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today*, BBC Radio 4, 13 May 1996.

⁶⁴ See, for example, the graphic manner in which Augustine describes his conversion in *Confessions*, (c.397 A.D.) Trans. R.S. Pine-Cofin, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961, Book 8. Section 12. p.177-9.

⁶⁵ "The point that Augustine was not very at ease with purely abstract thinking is usually made, and more tellingly I think, in relation to his difficulties in thinking of God as a purely 'spiritual' being without imagining some spatial dimension to God's existence. This difficulty is explored in Book 7 of the *Confessions*..... [and see also] Books 10 ff. of the *Confessions* for the way he agonises about the reality of time, space and form and in what sense God created the world." Letter from Angela Tilby to Jolyon Mitchell, 10 April, 1997.

⁶⁶ Angela Tilby, Recorded Interview, July 1996.

imagery, and parallels of imagery, in a very profound and interesting way”.⁶⁷ In one *Thought*, following a “vicious bomb” in Jerusalem, she challenges the image of God “who can never hurt anyone, never be angry with anyone and never condemn anyone” with a graphic extract from a Psalm rich in parallelism:

‘Pour out thy indignation upon them..... add to them punishment..... let them be blotted out among the book of the living.’..... What is real about the psalms is that they come from an imperfect world, where the basic crookedness of the human heart is recognised. God doesn’t just look on regretfully, but gets into battle himself. He fights, he judges, he delivers.⁶⁸

Tilby has clearly been angered by this atrocity in Jerusalem. She finds some of the resources for her response in the uncompromising pictures and language of the Psalms. Her unashamed references to God will be considered in detail later, but at this stage notice how through the language of the Psalms, she is not afraid to make an explicit challenge to the theological position which argues that “God himself can do nothing except sympathise with our distress.”⁶⁹

A third, and slightly surprising, facility which Angela Tilby draws upon is her ability to link colours with words: “I am one of those people who does see some words, particularly names in colour.”⁷⁰ She believes that this intriguing and slightly strange skill of connecting colour with words provides a further useful resource. It:

Sometimes means you have an imaginative capacity with language which people on the whole find interesting to listen to.....⁷¹

Tilby’s “imaginative capacity with language” will be examined later.

⁶⁷ Angela Tilby, Recorded Interview, July 1996. See: Alvin C. Rueter who argues “we should strive to preach like a Hebrew”, in other words, visually. Alvin C. Rueter, *Making Good Preaching Better*. Collegeville, Minnesota: *The Liturgical Press*, 1997, p.67. See also: Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Creative Preaching - Finding the Words*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980, pp.99-100. Achtemeier, an Old Testament scholar and homiletician, highlights the wide range of metaphors, similies and images to be found in the bible.

⁶⁸ Psalm 69:24ff and Angela Tilby, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today*, BBC Radio 4, 4 March 1996.

⁶⁹ Angela Tilby, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today*, BBC Radio 4, 4 March 1996.

⁷⁰ Angela Tilby, Recorded Interview, July 1996.

⁷¹ Angela Tilby, Recorded Interview, July 1996.

This section has highlighted Angela Tilby's wide-ranging broadcasting experience and certain resources that she believes assist her own broadcasting. These include her memory, biblical imagery, and her connection between words and colours. How far she actually draws upon each of these resources in *Thought* will provide an avenue by which to approach her radio broadcasting. Before turning to a detailed analysis of extracts of Tilby's broadcasts it is worth considering her own views about radio broadcasting and, in particular, pictorial language on the radio.

ii. Theory

I don't think I'd start with saying paint pictures with words. I'd say: "What will you want to say?" And then what you wrote I'd cut down to the core. When doing something like *Thought for the Day*, every word counts, you cannot afford to have superfluous adjectives, you cannot afford to have superfluous subordinate clauses and all the rest of it.

Tilby demonstrates a ruthless attitude towards excess discourse:

First of all, you shred it really, and then you build on, draw on, colour [and then ask] how can I make it more attractive, more engaging. There's a kind of asceticism about writing this kind of radio. It's got to be thin.⁷²

Angela Tilby's advice to a hypothetical broadcaster asking advice reveals an editorial rigour and a caution towards attaching too much importance towards painting pictures with words. This extract indicates that she believes this is a secondary skill for those broadcasters aiming to do successful *Thoughts*.

She does argue, however, for a "respect for the medium" of radio, and a respect for "what ears are for". She believes that "when people are not using their eyes, you call upon the eyes of the mind" and you can "approach the eye through the ear".⁷³ A

⁷² Angela Tilby, Recorded Interview, July 1996.

⁷³ Angela Tilby, Recorded Interview, July 1996.

single sentence best summarises her understanding of the one of the central strengths of radio:

Through the ear you see and that is the extraordinary gift of radio.⁷⁴

Early she spoke of another “gift” of radio, which is closely linked to this observation. In her eyes radio is really a “kind of incomplete medium” which does “call out from the listener a kind of imaginative response and I think radio broadcasting is really about that.”⁷⁵ The following section will consider how Angela Tilby attempts to draw upon these closely linked “gifts” or inherent strengths of radio, and how she puts them into practice.

iii. Practice

It is much easier to write a *Thought* when you call on a piece of experience which you can see in your mind.⁷⁶

Some of the ways in which Angela Tilby develops and uses pictorial language to engage the “eyes of the mind” will be considered through an analysis of five *Thoughts* broadcast between March and July 1996. In a private interview she explained the process of building her *Thought* for the 16th July, 1996:

I was seeing in my mind’s eye a picture of what I heard on the radio, which was a group of children with the headmistress singing a hymn. What was interesting was that when I got the paper this morning there was a picture that was almost more like I had imagined than I had imagined! It was right back to the 1950s with these little kids, hands clasped together, their eyes shut. It was enchanting.⁷⁷

Into her *Thought*, exploring the theme of prayer, Tilby integrates what she sees in her “mind’s eye” with the picture in the newspaper. This broadcast is constructed around four graphic scenes of school assemblies. Her opening scene deftly takes us

⁷⁴ Angela Tilby, Recorded Interview, July 1996.

⁷⁵ Angela Tilby, Recorded Interview, July 1996.

⁷⁶ Angela Tilby, Recorded Interview, July 1996.

⁷⁷ Angela Tilby, Recorded Interview, July 1996.

back to her own school experience in the 1950s where they had prayers “twice in the school day”:

There was no doubt in my five year old mind that prayer was talking to God, someone bigger than the very large headmistress in her black dress, high heels and seamed stockings. She was so fierce and frightening that I was impressed that she talked to God with deference. It gave me hope.⁷⁸

Tilby here makes use of the specific details of a “black dress, high heels and seamed stockings” to highlight the character of her head-teacher. This is balanced in the following scene where she leads her listeners to her next school “where prayers were called Assembly, and happened once a day, in a bright, sunny hall.” The listeners are introduced to her next “rather gentle head teacher in a bluebell coloured suit.”⁷⁹ Notice how the colour of clothes are used to distinguish the respective personalities of the head teachers.⁸⁰ This illustrates how her “imaginative capacity” for linking words and colour, noted earlier, contributes to her text.

The third scene portrayed is from her “grown-up school” in the 1960s. Tilby skilfully reflects how “prayers had become embarrassing”. She does this by her descriptions of “solemn agnostic rows of sixth formers stood with eyes unblinkingly open, sullenly examining their illegal nail varnish.”⁸¹ These three scenes help listeners to “see”, in the words of the homiletician Paul Scott Wilson, “by creating” images “as though making a movie”.⁸² In this example, Tilby is creating what might be described as a “slowed-down” verbal “movie”. She achieves this by recreating simple scenes with little movement but with specific, almost photographic, detail. The listeners are invited to recreate in their imaginations this scene of teenagers

⁷⁸ Angela Tilby, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today* BBC Radio 4, 16 July 1996.

⁷⁹ Angela Tilby, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today* BBC Radio 4, 16 July 1996.

⁸⁰ See for another *Thought* which notes the colour of clothes: Angela Tilby, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today* BBC Radio 4, 20 May 1996. Tilby begins her *Thought* about Tibet with passing attention to the colour of the Dalai Lama’s robe: “We’ve got used to seeing the Dalai Lama patiently travelling the world, with his red robe and unwearied smile....”

⁸¹ Angela Tilby, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today* BBC Radio 4, 16 July 1996.

⁸² Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1995, p.225. (See also n.4 and related text in the introduction of this thesis.)

standing in rows. The adjectives “unblinkingly” and “sullenly” create a mood and further demonstrate how Tilby attempts to put into practice what was noted earlier and she believes in theory about radio: “Through the ear you see and that is the extraordinary gift of radio.”⁸³

Interestingly, her fourth and final scene lacks any explicit pictorial elements. She merely states:

When the pupils returned to St Luke’s Primary School in Wolverhampton yesterday, the headmistress led them in a hymn of praise to God, not denying their recent trauma, but reassuring them of a strength and comfort beyond what fallible adults can ever hope to provide.⁸⁴

Tilby appears to assume that her listeners will already have the images of the school lodged in their minds. This is not an unreasonable assumption as the horrific knife attack on the children and teachers had been a lead story in TV news bulletins and newspapers of the preceding week. In this *Thought* Tilby demonstrates a discipline over the use of pictorial language. Specific details are used in order to evoke images in the listeners’ minds rather than constrict them. In her own words, she is attempting in different ways to “call out from the listener a kind of imaginative response.”⁸⁵

This is also the case in her *Thought* for 27th May 1996, which focused on her adventures on Mount Sinai. Her witty imaginary dialogue with the camel which carried her half-way up the mountain, is followed by a graphic description:

From the camel’s back I could see the harsh face of Sinai, the sun overhead. The rock face was implacable, a granite wall..... You lose sight of the peak when you get near, and then, quite suddenly, you’re there. You stumble into light and sky, and, where the elders

⁸³ Angela Tilby, Recorded Interview, July 1996.

⁸⁴ Angela Tilby, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today* BBC Radio 4, 16 July 1996.

⁸⁵ Angela Tilby, Recorded Interview, July 1996. Also cited above.

of Israel “beheld God and ate and drank” there’s a Church and a kiosk and you can have a cup of tea.⁸⁶

Her entire *Thought* is built around this picture. She shifts the subject from “I” to “you” and therefore the “point of view”⁸⁷ of the listener is subtly changed. Homiletician David Buttrick argues that “varied points of view in a sermon will be intrinsically interesting and serviceable.”⁸⁸ Whilst this is obviously not a sermon, a shift in the point of view by Tilby does add interest, as it implicitly invites the listener to join her on Mount Sinai itself. In other words, rather than distancing the listener by relying on an objective third person description, the move from the first to the second person encourages the listener to “stumble” into the “light and sky” of the top of Sinai for themselves.

Her description of the descent includes moves from the first person pronoun, “I”, through first person plural, “we”, and back to the singular “I”:

I dreamed of a bath and a cold beer..... When we finally got down, the light had almost gone. Only the summit was lit and I could see that the harsh shape was lined and scarred. I was marked by the mountain, I was tired and sore.⁸⁹

Tilby is also sensitive to the light and the shapes which Sinai creates; but she does not turn this into a distant but beautiful Ansell Adams style photographic representation. Instead she parallels the “marks” or “scars” of the mountain with her own marks. The result is that once again listeners are encouraged to participate in the picture itself. Tilby as the foot-weary explorer allows herself to become the person we can identify with. It is almost as if she has allowed herself to become a bridge into the picture itself.

⁸⁶ Angela Tilby, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today* BBC Radio 4, 27 May 1996.

⁸⁷ See David Buttrick’s discussion of “points of view” in *Homiletic*, London: SCM, 1987, pp.55-68.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p.68.

⁸⁹ Angela Tilby, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today* BBC Radio 4, 27 May 1996.

She performs a similar role in a third *Thought* which was broadcast on the 13th May 1996. This focused both on the “garden experience” of Augustine and her own parallel memories of reading in the garden:

I’m thinking of “summer gardens” because this time of year reminds me of the weeks I spent in the garden years ago trying to revise for exams. Bird song, cherry and magnolia bring back a frisson of fear. Yet they also bring a sense of grace. Gardens in May were the places I learned to learn.... I remember sitting on my own with a book, following the letters along a line with my finger, mouthing the sounds, and then suddenly the sounds in my head gripped the letters on the page and I understood.⁹⁰

With a few swift verbal brush-strokes, including references to “bird song, cherry and magnolia” the setting of Tilby’s garden is visually established. As in the earlier examples, the pictorial language is used to serve as a tool by which she draws the listener into a new world. The distant story of Augustine and the garden in Milan where he heard a voice cry “Tolle, Lege” (Take, Read), become more accessible to the listener through Tilby’s memorable pictures which evoke her own experience.

A fourth *Thought* by Tilby during this period of March to July 1996 is on the difficult experience of divorce and the dividing of possessions. It does not have the pictorial language of the three other examples already cited. Perhaps only two sentences reveal Tilby’s skill at evoking pictures with words. The first sets up a contrast: “What is united by a priest with prayers and confetti is unravelled by a judge in a welter of paperwork.”⁹¹ In these provocative oppositional phrases a “welter of paperwork” contrasts with “prayers and confetti”. Such references are not developed explicitly, but are brief visual hints, used to illustrate the painful reality of how “we do put asunder, over and over again.”⁹²

The second sentence, and the final words of the *Thought*, are another example of pictorial language pared down to its minimum: “Like a death, the end of a marriage

⁹⁰ Angela Tilby, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today* BBC Radio 4, 13 May 1996.

⁹¹ Angela Tilby, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today* BBC Radio 4, 9 July 1996.

⁹² Angela Tilby, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today* BBC Radio 4, 9 July 1996.

requires a funeral, and then for the ghosts and the bones to rest in peace.”⁹³ This is a powerful and moving *Thought* which implicitly draws upon Tilby’s own personal experience. Some ten months before, Tilby had made herself extremely vulnerable with another *Thought*, where she mentioned that her “marriage to a clergyman had ended in divorce.”⁹⁴ Interestingly, in both *Thoughts* her insights gain authority not only through the use of pictorial language, but also by her willingness to be vulnerable on air. I would argue, however, that as Tilby’s memory appears to be highly visual these two factors are closely intertwined.

In contrast to the previous example, pictorial vulnerability is almost entirely absent from a fifth *Thought* broadcast on 1st July 1996. This serves as a contrast to the four other *Thoughts* studied. The “topical tag” or news basis for this *Thought* was the previous day’s debate in the House of Lords over the asylum bill. Tilby’s broadcast centred on the “difference between law and justice”.⁹⁵ In only four hundred and thirty four words she attempts to explore the collision of two “moral concerns”: first, anger towards those who come to “milk the benefit system” and secondly, worry for those who “flee here seeking safety.”⁹⁶ These two opposing concerns raise the difficult question of how it is possible to discern the difference between two groups of people. The complexity of the issue and the far from specific terms that Tilby employs make it a hard *Thought* either to identify with or to construct pictures of in the mind. The result is a less than gripping broadcast.

Only in the last sentence, does she build an evocative metaphor: “In the high court of eternity, justice judges law.”⁹⁷ This concluding sentence is a provocative attempt to inject life into abstract concepts. It may be language used with finesse, but as a metaphor it relies on connecting the abstract noun “eternity” with the potentially visual image of “high court”. The personification of “justice” judging law is an active

⁹³ Angela Tilby, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today* BBC Radio 4, 9 July 1996.

⁹⁴ Angela Tilby, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today* BBC Radio 4, 18 September 1995.

⁹⁵ Angela Tilby, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today* BBC Radio 4, 1 July 1996.

⁹⁶ Angela Tilby, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today* BBC Radio 4, 1 July 1996.

⁹⁷ Angela Tilby, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today* BBC Radio 4, 1 July 1996.

phrase, but it still lacks explicit pictorial language. This broadcast serves as a useful balance to the four other *Thoughts* considered which make more consistent use of pictorial language. It illustrates that, whilst Tilby favours this device, it is by no means the only approach that she employs.

Earlier in the discussion, Tilby's belief that the name of God is being erased from public discourse was highlighted. Significantly, Tilby herself is not afraid to use the name of God in her *Thoughts*. In ten of her *Thoughts* broadcast between September 1995 and July 1996 "God" is mentioned thirty two times, an average of 3.2 per broadcast. Only in one of these ten broadcasts does "God" not appear. The highest number of mentions is to be found in her *Thought* on 4th March 1996; it has eight references to God. In it she reflects on a "vicious bomb in Jerusalem", and concludes her thought with the assertion: "We must show that the terrorist dream is empty and leave the last judgement to the God who is not only loving but strong." ⁹⁸

iv. Evaluation

On the basis of these five *Thoughts* by Angela Tilby it appears that pictorial language is an important characteristic of Tilby's *Thoughts*, but is not the only technique she employs. It is important, therefore, to emphasise that her pictorial language works in alliance with other discursive devices.

Another device employed by Tilby is the "enticing" structuring of her *Thoughts*. In other words, she often does not immediately reveal the point of what she is going to say. This is an attempt to draw her audience into listening and could be described, in the homiletician Fred Craddock's terms, as an *inductive* approach to speaking. David Coomes' description and evaluation of Angela Tilby's *Thoughts* provides support for this assertion. ⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Angela Tilby, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today* BBC Radio 4, 4 March 1996.

⁹⁹ See Chapter 1 section 3ii. of this thesis for a discussion and evaluation of Fred Craddock's inductive and deductive categories for preaching.

Angela Tilby is the liberal wing, the feminist liberal representative, one of several we have [doing *Thought*], who, at her best..... you hear the start of her talk and you think: "I will listen to this because it's going to have a *twist in the tail*, it's going to have something novel to say, it's not going to be run of the mill at all," and she develops it, unpacks it, and in the last paragraph gets there.¹⁰⁰

Coomes likens this sense of narrative uncertainty as being like:

a two-and-a-half minute detective story, where you're waiting for a surprise or waiting for some development that's not actually predictable.¹⁰¹

Without actually using Craddock's terms, he contrasts what could be described as an *inductive* approach with the *deductive* method employed by other contributors who:

say what they are planning to say in the first couple of paragraphs, then unpack, and it's fairly predictable, even if it can be quite well done. But those that actually set the subject at the top rooted in human experience or story and then develop and then come to a firm conclusion which is not absolutely predictable from the first paragraph, that's what I look for.¹⁰²

Tilby's *Thought* on divorce, for example, begins by rooting itself in human experience: "Ending a marriage is one of the hardest things in the world to do well". From the first few sentences it is not predictable how she will conclude. In her penultimate sentence she argues that "real forgiveness comes when you regain distance". Her last line, which was cited above, carries weight and poignancy connecting "death" with "the end of a marriage" which she argues also "requires a

¹⁰⁰ David Coomes, Recorded Interview, 19 Dec., 1996. (*Italics* are mine). He admits: "And I have [on *Thought*] Angela Tilby not so much for her theological standpoint, as the fact she writes very clever scripts, complex scripts, but not too complex and clever."

¹⁰¹ David Coomes, Recorded Interview, 19 Dec., 1996. This point is echoed by James Jones, the Bishop of Hull and a regular contributor to *Thought*. He also emphasises the importance of "surprise, of taking people in a direction where they're not quite sure of..... I think the parables of Jesus are like this..... If you want to know what the parables are about, you tell a story till you get to that moment when you say: ' Surprise! Surprise! ' The priest ran by, he didn't help, the Levite ran by, he didn't help, but surprise, surprise, the dread Samaritan stopped..... And I think too there's got to be an element of surprise in a sermon." James Jones, Private Recorded Interview with Jolyon Mitchell, 15 June, 1997. See also Chapter 3 and the Conclusion of this thesis for further discussions on parables.

¹⁰² David Coomes, Recorded Interview, 19 Dec., 1996.

funeral” so that the “ghosts and bones” be laid to rest. This is an example of Tilby’s ability to create a surprising twist in the conclusions of her stories.

Tilby’s broadcasts are not, however, universally successful. Sometimes she allows conceptual detail to obscure her message. This was highlighted in the discussion of her *Thought* on the asylum bill. In contrast to the other *Thoughts* considered, Tilby eschews vivid language and instead relies almost entirely on abstract concepts and generic nouns. The result is a *Thought* which lacks accessible language or surprising narrative. This provides a useful warning to preachers of the dangers of employing over-abstract discourse, which holds few points of connection for listeners. Of the *Thoughts* studied this represents an exception to her usual method.

In this final section it has been suggested that Tilby’s skill at creating pictures with words is usually augmented by other devices such as creating inductive and surprising narrative structures. Nevertheless, in spite of this qualifying observation, it is also important to highlight how Tilby creates what she describes elsewhere as a “visual theology” through her word pictures.¹⁰³ The evidence of the previous sections supports the claim that pictorial language still has a role in religious broadcasting. This conclusion, however, is based upon but one contributor to *Thought for the Day*, and in order to test out the claim more rigorously, other contributors need to be considered.¹⁰⁴

3. *Radio Rabbi - Rabbi Lionel Blue*

We are really trying to break down that wall between the ghetto and the boulevard. In practice, it all seems rather light, low, but in fact what we are trying to do, all religious broadcasters, we are trying to *translate* a religious ghetto into modern life - without any presuppositions, without assuming things, we are trying to tell people about religion who don’t have Scriptures, pray or anything

¹⁰³ Tilby uses this phrase in reference to a Coptic Monk, Father Benjamin’s explanation of the Coptic cross in “Who owns Jesus?” Episode 1 of *The Jesus Diary*, Radio 3, 2 December, 1996, produced by Norman Winter, written and presented by Angela Tilby.

¹⁰⁴ The lessons for preachers to learn will be discussed explicitly at the conclusion of this chapter.

like that at all. And I think we are succeeding, because people who are not religious, who do not pray, listen.....¹⁰⁵

Rabbi Lionel Blue has a unique approach towards breaking down the wall between “the ghetto and the boulevard”, and trying to “translate” the religious language of the ghetto into the discourse of “modern life.” His broadcasting theory and practice provide further useful evidence by which to test the hypothesis, stated above, that pictorial language has a significant role to play in religious broadcasting today. As with Angela Tilby, Lionel Blue’s work as a broadcaster and his sources for his broadcasting will be discussed prior to the analysis of specific broadcasts. These two areas may provide other insights into how much he values the use of pictorial language, as a tool for “translating” his message.¹⁰⁶

i. Blue as Broadcaster

Rabbi Lionel Blue is a Reformed rabbi, with a History degree from Oxford University and degree in Semitics from London University. He has worked as the European director of the World Union for Progressive Judaism in Brussels, he has been an editor of liturgy for over thirty years for the reformed synagogues and a lecturer at the Leo Baeck College in London since 1967.¹⁰⁷ He is best known, however, for his work as a radio broadcaster on both Radio 4 and Radio 2. He became a “household name” in the 1980s, like C.S. Lewis and R.S. Wright did in the 1940s, through his idiosyncratic broadcasts.¹⁰⁸

Lionel Blue - let’s face it is a one-off really because he just tells stories. Often quite disjointed stories I have to say, but he’s just a

¹⁰⁵ Rabbi Lionel Blue, private recorded interview with Jolyon Mitchell, Edinburgh, 31 October 1995. (*Italics are mine.*) “to these” follows the final word “listen” and refers to *Thought for the Day* and *Pause for Thought*.

¹⁰⁶ This phrase echoes Lamin Sanneh’s fascinating text: *Translating the Message, The Missionary Impact on Culture*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1989. Lionel Blue, however, uses it differently from Sanneh. For further discussion of **translation** see Chapter 7 of this thesis.

¹⁰⁷ Lionel Blue sees his editing work (*Forms of Prayer*) with Dr. Johnathan Magonet as his most important. See also: Lionel Blue, *A Backdoor to Heaven - An Autobiography*, Revised Edition, London: Fount, 1985 (1979).

¹⁰⁸ Lionel Blue, *Bright Blue - Rabbi Lionel Blue’s Thoughts for the Day*, London: BBC, 1985.

great character and he gets away with things that no other contributor, frankly, can get away with.¹⁰⁹

In 1994 Blue was awarded an O.B.E. partially for his services to broadcasting. To date, he is the only contributor to *Thought for the Day* who has had a BBC Radio Collection cassette made of his Radio 4 *Thoughts*.¹¹⁰

In some informal advice to young broadcasters, based on his own broadcasting experience which began in 1967, he emphasises the importance “of being yourself”, and of letting “weaknesses” and “doubts” come through.¹¹¹ Many of his broadcasts follow these suggestions, and are based upon an endearing “frankness”.¹¹² Whether speaking about his time in hospital,¹¹³ his operation,¹¹⁴ his homosexuality,¹¹⁵ or his insomnia,¹¹⁶ he is not afraid to speak with candour about what he has felt or is feeling. Such vulnerability marks him out from the *Today* presenters and reporters, as well as from many of the other contributors to *Thought*. His open approach has created a broadcasting persona which is an exemplification of what Norman Fairclough describes as the “foregrounding of personality”.¹¹⁷ In other words, Lionel Blue has become more than simply another “religious-sounding” voice on *Today*; through his style, he has

¹⁰⁹ David Coomes, Recorded Interview 19 Dec., 1996.

¹¹⁰ John Newbury, Producer, *Rabbi Lionel Blue - 50 Thoughts for the Day*, London: BBC Radio Collection, 1990.

¹¹¹ Rabbi Lionel Blue, Private Recorded Interview with Jolyon Mitchell, Edinburgh, 31 October 1995. (Hereafter referred to as: Lionel Blue, Recorded Interview, Oct. 1995.)

¹¹² Lionel Blue, *Bright Blue - Rabbi Lionel Blue's Thoughts for the Day*, London: BBC, 1985. In the introduction he admits after reassembling and reading a number of his *Thoughts* through, he was pleased with their “frankness. My only regret was that I hadn't been franker.” p.7. Compare these sentiments with Phillips Brooks well-known assertion that: “Preaching is the bringing of truth through personality”. Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching: Delivered before the Divinity School of Yale College in January and February, 1877*, Manchester, England: James Robinson, 1989, p.5.

¹¹³ Rabbi Lionel Blue, *Thought for the Day*, BBC Radio 4, 14 September 1987.

¹¹⁴ Rabbi Lionel Blue, *Thought for the Day*, BBC Radio 4, 6 March 1989.

¹¹⁵ See: Diana Pulson, “‘God slot’ Rabbi's revelation”, *Liverpool Echo*, 7 October 1995. Some critics have argued that Blue has abused his platform, and used *Thought* for his own personal agenda, and as a psychological mirror for helping him understand his own complex personality.

¹¹⁶ Rabbi Lionel Blue, *Thought for the Day*, BBC Radio 4, 30 January 1989.

¹¹⁷ Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, London: Edward Arnold, 1995, p.147. “This is often perceived and portrayed in a way which harmonizes with the core contemporary cultural value of individualism, in terms of a foregrounding of the unique and individual personalities of, especially, different presenters.”

established a strong individual identity for himself. Blue's own understanding of why this "frankness" is useful for religious broadcasters is illuminating:

If you say what's really in your mind, not what ought to be in your mind, this is the secret of radio religion! Terry Wogan, Derek Jameson are themselves.¹¹⁸ You don't have to be the brightest, the most mystical but it does have to be you. One of the problems in radio religion is that people are not themselves..... religious people stand a little above themselves. They don't speak from their real centre. This is OK from the pulpit, where they're expected to speak for their tradition, but radio is totally different. Even though you might be speaking to millions, it is very, very personal. The good preachers on radio have ceased to give sermons.¹¹⁹

By speaking with "frankness" from his own "centre", Blue has created for himself an identity not of a preacher, but rather a popular conversationalist. Such a mode of discourse is very much in keeping with the "populist, common-sense style"¹²⁰ of the *Today* presenters. Blue also recognises, nevertheless, that when he does *Thought* he is "in the middle of a very fast News Programme" where "what you say has to be very tight."¹²¹ Part of Blue's skill is his ability to combine a sense of conversation with a "tight" script.

He repeatedly distances himself from seeing his broadcasting in traditional preaching terms: he perceives it as a "much more intimate" form of preaching, "without the robes and choirs."¹²² As an experienced broadcaster and preacher, however, he does make a surprisingly over-simple distinction between broadcasting and preaching styles:

In radio you are forced to be one thing which you are not in an ordinary pulpit. In the ordinary pulpit, you can be grand, mystical, that sort of thing; but in the radio you have to be relevant, and you have to fit in with the actual circumstances. You can't put on the

¹¹⁸ Rabbi Lionel Blue has often shared the same studio as these two presenters, Terry Wogan and Derek Jameson, as he regularly does the 9.15 am *Pause for Thought* on the 6.30-9.30am Radio 2 morning sequence. For an extreme example of a radio broadcaster who speaks all that is on his mind see the recent film about the American DJ or "shock jock", Howard Stern, *Private Parts*, 1997.

¹¹⁹ Lionel Blue, Recorded Interview, Oct., 1995.

¹²⁰ Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, London: Edward Arnold, 1995, p.142.

¹²¹ Lionel Blue, Recorded Interview, Oct., 1995.

¹²² Lionel Blue, Recorded Interview, Oct., 1995.

plummy voice or preachy voice or a special one to show you are saying special thoughts..... It is the same world as the bed, the traffic jam and everything else.¹²³

As a broadcaster Lionel Blue certainly avoids the “plummy voice or preachy voice”. His resonant and warm East-End London accent is distinctive, but also reassuringly “normal”. This adds to the apparent normality of the pictures he creates.

This combines with a simple but imaginative process, where he thinks not of the huge audience but of “someone in my kitchen” who he is “talking things over” with, “over a cup of tea”.¹²⁴ As a preacher he never uses notes because he wants to see his listeners’ faces and believes he is involved in a “dialogue”, a “conversation”. Obviously he cannot precisely replicate this flexible process in the radio studio, but Blue does believe himself to be involved in a “conversation” with his listeners:

I’m not quite sure why it happens, and it sounds a bit precious, but it’s as if I am seeing people through the mike and I realise this isn’t working. “No, I’ll put it to you this way.” You are constrained by the fact you have to have a script, of course time is important.¹²⁵

This highly visual experience, of “seeing people through the mike”, and of imagining a few of his listeners across the table, appears to help him “fit in with” what he describes as their “actual circumstances”, as well as make last second minor alterations to his script.

The picture that emerges of Lionel Blue is of a skilled broadcaster, who believes that openness, a conversational style and seeing his audience all help him to communicate. Blue is a religious broadcaster who accepts that he is involved in a “dialogue” and that the “time of telling people what their problem should be and what their answers are, that time is gone.”¹²⁶ His self-declared aim is to “help people write the

¹²³ Lionel Blue, Recorded Interview, Oct., 1995.

¹²⁴ Lionel Blue, Recorded Interview, Oct., 1995.

¹²⁵ Lionel Blue, Recorded Interview, Oct., 1995.

¹²⁶ Lionel Blue, Recorded Interview, Oct., 1995.

scriptures of their own lives” and to explore the “metaphysics of happiness”, rather than do P.R. for his “own religion”.¹²⁷

He also appears to delight in his radio audience, his “nicest congregation”, as he still identifies with “non-religious people” because he was a Marxist in his youth, “and an ideological anarchist”; and he believes that part of him is “still like that”.¹²⁸ This identification is also assisted by his strong visual imagination, which allows him to imagine specific individuals in his audience. As with Angela Tilby, his gift for seeing also provides resources for his broadcasts. It is to this that we now turn.

ii. Sources

I nearly became an artist once. I had this sort of small exhibition, then decided I wouldn't go on with it because it was either full time or nothing, but pictures do come into my mind, for instance pictures of the East End of London. Whenever I painted it was pictures of the East End of London, people I remember and memories..... I want to paint now. In painting the synagogue meetings of 40 years ago..... I'm beginning to understand..... what these things are saying to me. And it's as if my mind takes snapshots of things.¹²⁹

Lionel Blue admits to being a “failed painter”, but he believes that his sensitivity to what he sees, to take “snapshots of things”, has considerably “influenced him as a broadcaster”.¹³⁰ He is acutely observant of details whether he is “watching the people in the underground station” or wondering “why that man is wearing odd socks in the concourse of Euston”.¹³¹ His eye for detail will be considered more carefully in the discussion of specific broadcasts. At this stage it is worth pointing to the possible link between Blue's interest in painting and the “snapshots” in his memory.

¹²⁷ Lionel Blue, Recorded Interview, Oct., 1995.

¹²⁸ Lionel Blue, Recorded Interview, Oct., 1995.

¹²⁹ Lionel Blue, Recorded Interview, Oct., 1995.

¹³⁰ Lionel Blue, Recorded Interview, Oct., 1995.

¹³¹ Lionel Blue, Recorded Interview, Oct., 1995.

His understanding of the role of such pictures is intriguing:

I think these pictures are trying to tell me something. If life is a series of pictures which stay in my mind and each of them has a message, like the stations of the cross or something, except that mine are jolly.¹³²

In each picture that he remembers he therefore sees the potential for a message. These snapshots or pictures derive not only from what he saw, but also from what he read. He was a “very lonely child” who read a lot. This has also stocked “his mind with images and all sorts of things”.¹³³ He does not develop these identifications of some of the sources of his broadcasting into a theory of verbal pictures, but instead grounds his theory in terms of practical advice to new broadcasters:

You’ve got to take up a story or incident that keeps on coming into your mind, that’s very important to you..... it might be important to the listener. If it’s not important to you it will always be contrived.¹³⁴

This advice echoes his early thoughts on the importance of speaking from the “centre” of the personality and “of being yourself” as a broadcaster.

Two potential sources for Blue’s broadcasts have therefore been identified: first, snapshots from his memory and secondly, personal experiences. Throughout his broadcasts he draws primarily not from the scriptures, but from his own experience. He explains this approach with a highly generalised observation about both preachers and listeners:

..... all preachers sort of live in a religious ghetto. They assume that everybody knows a certain religious terminology or believes certain things. Most of the people don’t believe and they don’t have scriptures. They don’t know what scripture is..... [scriptures] are marvellous, but too long ago and too far away to matter, what happened to you yesterday is far more important than what happened to Moses 4,000 years ago or Jesus 2,000 years ago.¹³⁵

¹³² Lionel Blue, Recorded Interview, Oct., 1995.

¹³³ Lionel Blue, Recorded Interview, Oct., 1995. He continues: “bits of Bunyan come out, Blake, Diaries, all sorts of things.”

¹³⁴ Lionel Blue, Recorded Interview, Oct., 1995.

¹³⁵ Lionel Blue, Recorded Interview, Oct., 1995.

Many of the assumptions stated here are open to question, are different from Tilby's, but his words provide further evidence of the importance that Blue gives to the drawing upon personal experience for broadcasts.

One other source for Blue, he describes as his "Divine Friend". This has been a "construct in my mind" since "my Quaker days" at Oxford.¹³⁶ In his own words he claims to see it sometimes:

Sometimes we put our hands around each other, it looks like a Guardian Angel, sometimes like a Jesus figure, sometimes like Ann Frank or somebody like that.¹³⁷

Blue's "Divine Friend" is not a surrogate script-writer, producer, or editor for his broadcasts. In Blue's eyes, his friend is someone who he wants to please, who has given good advice, and has not led him into "cloud cuckoo" land.¹³⁸ It is hard to locate precisely the role that this elusive "friend" plays in Blue's broadcasting, nevertheless it is clearly understood to be another more indirect source for his verbal pictures.

This part of the discussion has highlighted three sources for Lionel Blue's broadcasting pictures: First, his "painter's eye" enabling the detailed recall of experiential and literary memories, secondly, personal experience and thirdly, his "divine friend". How these three strands have contributed to specific *Thoughts* will now be considered in greater detail.

iii. Practice

In the mid to late 1980s and early 1990s Rabbi Lionel Blue's name became almost synonymous with *Thought for the Day*. His popularity is reflected in the publication

¹³⁶ Lionel Blue, *Bright Blue - Rabbi Lionel Blue's Thoughts for the Day*, London: BBC, 1985, pp.64ff.

¹³⁷ Lionel Blue, Recorded Interview, Oct., 1995.

¹³⁸ Lionel Blue, Recorded Interview, Oct., 1995.

of many of his scripts¹³⁹ and the production of a BBC cassette.¹⁴⁰ The researcher considering Blue's *Thoughts* is confronted by an embarrassment of riches.

In one early *Thought* he is candid about how he draws upon his own personal experience. Blue admits:

A major source of ideas for sermons and spirituality came to me in airport lounges, bars, cafés (not always the genteel ones) and bus queues. To my astonishment the still, small voice of God spoke to me through the clamour of a juke-box.¹⁴¹

In the following paragraph he speaks of a Marlene Dietrich song: "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" In short sentences, he summarises the song: "Young Girls pick them. They give them to their men. The men had gone to war, and got killed. Out of their graves little flowers grew. Where had they gone, those flowers? Well, young girls had picked them....." This *Thought* concludes with a powerful picture built around what he saw in a café in Germany. The unstated suggestion is that this poignantly repetitive song is playing on the juke-box in the background of the café:

I looked up and saw a young boy and girl at the next table. A vase of flowers separated them. The full tragedy of Europe came home to me, and I knew the work I must do. So many people had to be reconciled to break that terrible repetition. God had spoken.¹⁴²

The three scenes are skilfully woven together. The flowers act as a connecting sign which signify how war separates and how the tragedy repeats itself. This provides a good example of how his "painter's eye" draws on a memory of his personal experience. The normality of the café scene is undermined by what has gone before it: the song highlighting the tragic waste of war and the need for reconciliation. The

¹³⁹ Lionel Blue, *Bright Blue - Rabbi Lionel Blue's Thoughts for the Day*, London: BBC, 1985.

¹⁴⁰ John Newbury, Producer, *Rabbi Lionel Blue - 50 Thoughts for the Day*, London: BBC Radio Collection, 1990. Subtitled: "On everything from Benidorm to Baked Beans and Sod's Law to Sex and St. Francis".

¹⁴¹ Lionel Blue, *Bright Blue - Rabbi Lionel Blue's Thoughts for the Day*, London: BBC, 1985, p.11.

¹⁴² *ibid.*, p.12. Compare R.S. Wright's observation, also cited in the previous chapter, that: "almost every railway carriage contains at least one sermon". R.S. Wright, "10th April 1942" in *Personal Journal/Diary*, National Library, Edinburgh: Unpublished, 1942, p.34.

meaning of a simple vase of flowers separating a girl and boy is therefore invested with new meaning by the preceding song. An easily recognisable scene is therefore, extended to explain how Blue learned that “the still small voice of God” speaks from unexpected sources.

In this *Thought*, the idea of “God” is introduced through an everyday discourse which draws heavily upon pictorial language. The central point of the *Thought* is that God is not necessarily found in the midst of religious institutions and religious discourse. Blue is implicitly inviting his listeners, through pictorial language, to extend their horizons and to be open to the possibility of God speaking to them in and through their everyday lives.

This is a central element of Blue’s message. In one *Thought*, entitled “A Tall Story from the Talmud”, he makes this point explicit:

When you pray, hold up your ordinary life to God, and you will find something extraordinary on it - His fingerprints. Among the confusion of voices in your mind is His still small voice.¹⁴³

Like Tilby, Blue is not afraid of naming “God”, but does so less frequently than Tilby. Of the 41 *Thoughts* published in *Bright Blue* the word “God” is used by Blue 88 times, an average of just over 2.1 times in each *Thought*. Occasionally it is embedded in a traditional blessing or prayer, but more often it is within a picture of everyday life.

One of Blue’s most memorable and characteristically humorous word pictures is his description of what he did when he fell into a grave:

Climbing out of a grave is not easy, or dignified. I am not athletic, and I was tangled up in my black robes of black bombazine and my velvet hat. They passed down the ropes, but it was as difficult as a ski lift, and I kept on falling and bouncing back on that awful coffin

¹⁴³ Lionel Blue, *Bright Blue - Rabbi Lionel Blue’s Thoughts for the Day*, London: BBC, 1985, p.40.

lid. I peered up at the mourners and they down at me, and at last I knew what it was like to be at the receiving end of a funeral.¹⁴⁴

This unforgettable event is described graphically by Blue. He uses it as a device to highlight the dangers of taking ourselves and our dignity too seriously. In this *Thought* there is an endearing self-mockery and also a natural turning to God in prayer in a café over a cup of coffee after the funeral. It is interesting to notice how the discourse of prayer is placed visually into the ordinary context of a café. The result is to transform prayer into an activity which need not be restricted to an explicitly religious context.

iv. *Evaluation*

These *Thoughts* illustrate how Blue uses pictorial language as a device for attempting to translate the discourse of the "religious ghetto" into the discourse of modern life. He often uses it to bring colour to his humorous stories which aim to break down the wall between "the ghetto and the boulevard." As with Angela Tilby, it is important to highlight that pictorial language is but one of a number of verbal devices which Blue employs.

Some of these devices provoke strong reactions. Journalist, Andrew Grimes, for example, is clearly dissatisfied with Blue's attempt to be colloquial:

Rabbi Lionel Blue's occasional stints on *Thought for the Day*, the little God-slot which holds up Radio 4's *Today* programme every morning, are not always worth more than five seconds' attention. He has many irritating mannerisms - prefacing every sermonette, for instance, with a pseudo-colloquial "Well, now" - and he makes embarrassingly awful jokes.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.19. "I was burying an old lady in winter, and the ground was icy. I stood around the ground with mourners. They passed me a spade to throw in some earth, for this is part of the Jewish ritual. In my fervour I got carried away, and slipped - the earth went in first, then went the spade, and then me."

¹⁴⁵ Andrew Grimes, "Radio News", in *Manchester Evening News*, 11 February, 1995. For other listeners these are seen as endearing idiosyncrasies.

These criticisms, if a little harsh, are a useful warning to broadcasters and preachers about the dangers of verbal idiosyncrasies,¹⁴⁶ or what could be described as “studied spontaneity”.¹⁴⁷

By contrast David Coomes appears almost unrealistically positive:

Rabbi Lionel Blue is the character, he's the one-off who'll go on for ever. He can't fail to please. People feel comfortable with him. He almost performs what Hugo Gryn did on the *Moral Maze*: you want to hear the voice of comfort and humanity and so on.¹⁴⁸

This is claiming too much for Blue, but it does illustrate how his success is based on far more than simply using pictorial language. James Jones argues that: “the reason why Rabbi Lionel Blue is so successful is because he is so descriptive, and sometimes you wonder where he is going in the *Thought*, but his success is that he tells a good story.”¹⁴⁹ His stories, his humour, his openness and his vulnerability in the content of his broadcasts all contribute to his performance. Even the highly critical Andrew Grimes was “quite impressed”¹⁵⁰ by Blue's thought-provoking honesty in one of his *Thoughts*. It has been argued in this section that Blue's ability to speak pictorially, from what he describes as “the centre”, strengthens the quality of many of his talks.

¹⁴⁶ One fellow broadcaster, who asked to remain anonymous, argues that Blue is in danger of becoming a caricature of himself, and has become trapped into playing his own public persona. This view does not do justice to Blue's own emphasis upon the importance of “speaking from the centre.”

¹⁴⁷ The danger of Blue's studied spontaneity became transparent when on one occasion he turned to the second page of his *Thought* and it was not there. In spite of prompting from John Humphries he was unable to continue his *Thought*. It highlights the danger of being entirely script-bound in a live communicative setting. Nevertheless, he received many letters of support after this broadcast. He believes it illustrates the “danger of becoming over slick” as a religious communicator. Lionel Blue, Recorded Interview, Oct., 1995. This is also a pertinent point for preachers today.

¹⁴⁸ David Coomes, Recorded Interview 19 Dec., 1996.

¹⁴⁹ James Jones affirms Blue's descriptive broadcasting style, by criticising his own: “The great thing about *Thought* is to be descriptive and not prescriptive, and what you're doing is putting yourself into the shoes of people and trying to describe what they are. And *Thought* fails and I'm afraid that there are too many of us who do it, prescribing, saying: “We must this and we must that,” and those prescriptive things are terribly hectoring and, I think, very alienating.” James Jones, Recorded Interview, 15 June, 1997.

¹⁵⁰ Andrew Grimes, “Radio News”, in *Manchester Evening News*, 11 February, 1995. Grimes goes on to confess that he was “quite impressed” with a particular *Thought* by Blue which touched on feelings of patriotism, sexual frustration and guilt, connected with the Second World War victory celebrations. Grimes admits: “I was impressed by the rabbi's little talk because it was most unusually, attached to a genuine thought. Paradoxically, *Thought for the Day* is usually short on thought.”

4. *Radio Canon - David Winter*

Broadcasting on radio for over 30 years, Canon David Winter has also been involved in trying to break down the “wall between the ghetto and the boulevard”. As with Angela Tilby and Lionel Blue, his broadcasting theory and practice provide further useful evidence by which to assess the hypothesis that pictorial language has a significant role to play in religious broadcasting today. His work as a broadcaster and the sources for his broadcasting will be discussed prior to the discussion of specific broadcasts. These two areas may provide further insight into how much he values the use of pictorial language on radio.

i. *Winter as Broadcaster*

In much the same way as Lionel Blue visualises people when he speaks into the microphone, so David Winter often imagines specific listeners as he prepares to broadcast:

When I was broadcasting *The Daily Service*, as I sort of got myself ready to go on the air, the green light was flashing, I always thought of my parents-in-law who always listen to *The Daily Service*, down in Suffolk. You know, they made their cup of coffee and they sat down, so I was actually broadcasting to them as a very typical listener, so it wasn't just a microphone, or the empty walls of All Souls, which is very difficult to come to terms with, I was actually broadcasting to them.....¹⁵¹

David Winter first broadcast in 1966 and was a contributor for nearly 6 years before joining the staff of the BBC in 1971. He worked as a producer between 1971 and 1975, a senior producer between 1975 and 1982, and then became head of Religious Broadcasting Radio in 1982, a post he held until 1987 when he was promoted again to be the head of Religious Broadcasting for both television and radio. He retired

¹⁵¹ David Winter, Private Recorded Interview with Jolyon Mitchell in Oxford, 14 September, 1995. (Hereafter referred to as: David Winter, Recorded Interview, Sept. 1995.)

from this position in 1989 to become a parish priest in the Oxford Diocese, though he continues to be a regular contributor to BBC radio.

As with Angela Tilby, his experience as a producer has influenced the way he works as a radio broadcaster. He admits: "I like doing *Thought for the Day*, but it's very demanding, very, very demanding." As a former producer he recognises that there is little room for failure: "Two bad *Thoughts for the Day* and you're off."¹⁵²

Interestingly one of his "most frequent criticisms" of many *Thoughts for the Day* was not that they lacked pictorial language, but rather that they "didn't actually say anything". Instead they would merely be a sociological analysis of a problem that would "leave you feeling guilty". He encouraged contributors to be more constructive in their approach: "I can remember umpteen times saying to people: 'OK, but what do you want to do about it?'"¹⁵³ He believes that if *Thought* simply "worries" people or only "unpacks problems" then it is slipping into the more general malaise found elsewhere on radio today:

One of the great problems I feel with modern radio is that it does a lot of worrying. I mean Radio 4 is one long string of worries from the moment it opens to last thing at night. Problems, matters of concern, things we should be worried about..... How we are bringing up our children, health, money..... Some *Thought for the Day* speakers, as I think some preachers, tend to be rather good at unpacking the problems and not very good at giving the answers.¹⁵⁴

Winter's answer to what he sees as the worry-factory of Radio 4 is a belief that religious broadcasting has a distinctive contribution to make to Radio 4's output. This might be summarised by one line: "Religious Broadcasting is keeping the rumour of God alive." Winter is quoting Robert Foxtrot, a former broadcasting colleague and "one of the most brilliant broadcasters I've ever produced". In this simple objective of "keeping the rumour of God alive", the broadcasters Blue, Tilby and Winter are united. It is in their styles of broadcasting that they are contrasting.

¹⁵² David Winter, Recorded Interview, Sept., 1995.

¹⁵³ David Winter, Recorded Interview, Sept., 1995.

¹⁵⁴ David Winter, Recorded Interview, Sept., 1995.

Winter also shares with Tilby and Blue the conviction that he has learnt the importance of rigorous “discipline” from his experience as a broadcaster:

I’ve got used to saying something well, fairly, I think, fairly profound, obviously in 2 minutes 45 seconds and I am astonished listening to preachers - they take so long to get to the point sometimes. I also think that in the modern world our concentration for listening to things for a long while is probably reduced and you know there are many other calls on our attention, so that you lose people.¹⁵⁵

Whilst Winter, along with Tilby and Blue, argues that preaching has much to learn from the discipline of broadcasting, he also suggests that religious broadcasters often need to exercise “restraint” in what they say on air.¹⁵⁶

Winter’s understanding of his role as a contributor to *Thought* has inevitably been shaped both by his experience as a producer and by the constraints imposed upon him by working on Radio 4. Bearing Winter’s observations in mind, it is time to consider some of the sources which might have influenced his use of pictorial language, or its absence, in *Thought for the Day*.

ii. Sources

You need to make connections with people, if you look at the Radio audience, [you ask] how can I connect with this disparate mass, two and a half million people? So you’re looking for connections.....

This word, “connect”, is central to Winter’s objectives as a broadcaster and preacher. His central aim, to connect with his listeners, influences the sources upon which he draws for his *Thoughts*. These sources can be summarised by three words: topical, convictional and scriptural. Significantly for the underlying argument, it would not be entirely accurate at this stage to add the word “visual”. This point will be considered later.

¹⁵⁵ David Winter, Recorded Interview, Sept., 1995.

¹⁵⁶ David Winter, Recorded Interview, Sept., 1995. He continues: “You can’t really use BBC Radio as an evangelistic media, so you can’t call people to get on their knees in their lounge.”

First, Winter, as an experienced broadcaster, appears almost obsessed with being **topical**. The reason for this, I would argue, is not an over-developed news instinct, rather the desire to “connect” with his listeners. *Thought* should not, according to Winter, be too “remote” or “too conceptual”, and should arise “out of a topical situation”.¹⁵⁷ For example, in the week in 1995 where Jonathan Edwards broke the world triple jump record in Göttenberg, Winter could not resist quoting what Edwards had said after achieving this feat:

While the headlines screamed their delight, Edwards himself took a more restrained view of things: ‘When all’s said and done, it was just a matter of jumping sixty feet into a sand pit’, he said. ‘That’s not the most important thing in the world. Being a good husband, being a good parent, trying to glorify God in everything I do - *that’s* what’s important.’¹⁵⁸

Winter wisely relies on Edwards’ own words, rather than attempting to recreate the sixty foot jump by creating his own word picture. He assumes that his listeners have seen it, because, in his opinion, in contrast with a sermon “there’s not time to recreate a word picture”.¹⁵⁹ In this case, Winter, like Tilby when she spoke of the primary school in Wolverhampton,¹⁶⁰ relies upon pictures already lodged in his listeners’ minds, rather than attempting to recreate them himself.

In Winter’s own eyes part of the reason for this, beyond the obvious time constraints, may also be related to the nature of his own imagination:

I don’t have a terribly good visual imagination. I’m a verbal person really, and I’ve heard preachers who do have marvellous visual imaginations and they conjure up brilliant pictures. I think my own way is verbal, but it does include pictures obviously.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ David Winter, Recorded Interview, Sept., 1995.

¹⁵⁸ David Winter, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today* BBC Radio 4, 12 August 1995.

¹⁵⁹ David Winter, Recorded Interview, Sept., 1995.

¹⁶⁰ See Angela Tilby section iii on “Practice” in this chapter.

¹⁶¹ David Winter, Recorded Interview, Sept., 1995.

This self-assessment will be tested later in the discussion, but notice how he makes a divide between people with a “visual imagination” and a “verbal person”. He sees himself as following the “verbal” way. Part of the case being argued in this chapter is that these categories of “visual” and “verbal” broadcasters are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Winter does, however, acknowledge the potential power of pictures as a source and bridge for communication which connects: “I love vivid language when other people use it and on the rare occasions when I manage to use it myself.”¹⁶² The ability to craft vivid language, which often finds its source in the visual imagination, is a skill which Winter admires but feels he lacks. He affirms, nevertheless, those who develop the powers of observation beyond what is happening in the studio:

Good broadcasters are people who have their ears open all the while and are really noticing, their eyes are open to what’s going on around them.¹⁶³

A picture emerges of a broadcaster who draws upon topical news stories or images to act as a connection between himself and the listeners. For this reason he keeps his “eyes and ears open” to the images of the day. Whilst he believes himself to lack visual imagination, he still delights in those who can use it to good effect.

Secondly, Winter, who also has considerable experience as a preacher, believes that topical *Thoughts* which lack **conviction** can easily slip into becoming little more than problem-centred radio. “I suppose” Winter admits, “I believe in conviction broadcasting”.¹⁶⁴ For this reason he emphasises the importance of sensing a “burden God has given” him to communicate:

I would say: ‘Don’t preach!’, ‘Don’t broadcast!’ if you haven’t got that,[you need] not just a desire to be well known or to be on

¹⁶² David Winter, Recorded Interview, Sept., 1995.

¹⁶³ David Winter, Recorded Interview, Sept., 1995.

¹⁶⁴ David Winter, Recorded Interview, Sept., 1995.

the radio.....[but a desire] to communicate something and to
connect.....¹⁶⁵

Winter frequently emphasises the importance of conviction broadcasting: "I still think that conviction in broadcasting comes across."¹⁶⁶ For himself, he speaks of his own "excitement" with the message of "forgiveness" and "healing", and his belief that it is "good for people". He therefore wants to connect in order to "share that" conviction. He summarises this by citing Jeremiah: "There's a fire burning in my bones and it will be out."¹⁶⁷

This biblical insight leads us to a third source which Winter draws upon: **scripture**. Whilst he does not submerge his *Thoughts* with biblical texts, the bible appears to be a significant resource:

.....the best thing about religious broadcasting and preaching is to take the actual concerns of your listeners and then to think through them biblically and to try to find some answer from God. Is there a Word of the Lord? Or is there Good News about this?¹⁶⁸

On this basis, it is clear that David Winter stands apart from Lionel Blue's approach which encourages listeners to search for "the scripture of their own lives". For Blue the answer is often to be found internally, whereas for Winter it is usually to be located in an external source, which is often a biblical text. Winter also appears to have more articulated confidence than Blue in the immediate relevance of the ancient scriptures to the concerns of today. The vivid language used by figures in the bible such as Jeremiah and Jesus provides an example to follow and a source to tap for David Winter in his *Thoughts*.

¹⁶⁵ David Winter, Recorded Interview, Sept., 1995.

¹⁶⁶ David Winter, Recorded Interview, Sept., 1995. He continues: "When you hear a broadcaster you know, or I think you feel you know, how committed, and passionate, and energetic they are about what they are saying."

¹⁶⁷ Jeremiah 20: 9 "There is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones" (RSV), and David Winter, Recorded Interview, Sept., 1995.

¹⁶⁸ David Winter, Recorded Interview, Sept., 1995. For example, see David Winter, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today*, BBC Radio 4, 21 May 1996, where he discusses the "human attraction to faction" [not fiction]. He concludes by citing Paul's admonition to "Speak the Truth in Love". Ephesians 4:15.

iii. Practice

A number of significant points can be highlighted from the last two parts of the discussion. First, Winter's considerable broadcasting experience and his belief in the discipline needed to do *Thought* underline how much preachers can learn from the practice of broadcasting. Secondly, his passions for connecting, for topicality and for conviction, which find some of their roots in his own broadcasting experience and other roots in his own trust in the Christian message. This extends to his confidence in the relevance of the vivid language of the bible.

One tension, however, emerges from the foregoing discussion. On the one hand, Winter applauds those who make use of pictorial language; whilst on the other hand, he confesses to a personal lack of visual imagination. Behind this tension lies a further concern that within the constraints of *Thought* there is simply not time to create word-pictures, or at least extended word-pictures. In some cases Winter assumes his listeners have already seen the picture. If Winter is accurate in his self-assessment and correct to challenge the place of pictorial language in *Thought* then a question-mark is raised over the original thesis that pictorial language has a significant role in religious broadcasting today.

In one *Thought*, from March 1995, he uses a relatively developed word picture to describe a visit to Northern Ireland after the 1994 cease-fires:

This week I paid my first visit to Northern Ireland since the cease-fires. The streets of Belfast were thronged with shoppers. Teenagers were laughing and mucking about. The shops were busy. No one examined my bags, there was not one body search, not one security gate to be negotiated.¹⁶⁹

In this example, short sentences and active verbs combine with visual details which create a sense of "the almost festive atmosphere"¹⁷⁰ in Belfast during the cease-fire.

¹⁶⁹ David Winter, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today*, BBC Radio 4, 4 March 1995.

¹⁷⁰ David Winter, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today*, BBC Radio 4, 4 March 1995.

According to Winter this is a rarity in his *Thoughts*, as he claims not to employ this technique rarely: "I don't think I've gone in for much in the way of 'visual imagery'" ¹⁷¹.

In order to test the accuracy of this statement, let us examine five *Thoughts* by David Winter broadcast during the period of April to June 1996. The first was broadcast on Easter Saturday, 6th April, 1996, and gained its topicality by an Easter theme. He began wittily: "It must be Easter, because I saw the former Bishop of Durham on the television this week, with his seasonal doubts about the empty tomb of Jesus." ¹⁷² He then moved on to speaking of a programme on BBC 1: "which hints darkly that the bones of Jesus might have been contained in an empty jar found in Jerusalem. Take the two together, add on hot cross buns and Easter eggs, and you can be absolutely sure that it's Easter again." ¹⁷³ In these opening three sentences he draws on a number of pictures. He speaks of the seeing the Bishop of Durham on television. He then refers to the "empty tomb". This is balanced in the next sentence by an "empty jar found in Jerusalem." In this opening section Winter produces tightly packed series of images, which have the potential to evoke listeners' pictures in the mind, concluding with brief references to hot cross buns and Easter eggs. The assumption in this broadcast appears to be that the listeners do not need too much help to create their own pictures. He therefore doesn't need to paint pictures, he only has to mention them.

The second *Thought* was broadcast on 13th April 1996, and responds to the newspaper story that "Young People Desert the Church in Droves". He speaks pictorially of the modern young people, who have "their eyes glued to the computer

¹⁷¹ David Winter, private letter to Jolyon Mitchell, 30 July 1996.

¹⁷² David Winter, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today*, BBC Radio 4, 6 April 1996.

¹⁷³ David Winter, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today*, BBC Radio 4, 6 April 1996. Television programme referred to was *Heart of the Matter*, produced by Chris Mann, presented by Joan Bakewell, broadcast on BBC 1, 8 April 1996. See also "The Tomb that Dare not Speak its Name - An archaeological discovery in Israel challenges the very basis of Christianity" in *The Sunday Times News Review*, 31 March 1996. Then notice the contrasting headline: "Experts dismiss 'Jesus tomb' find by television crew" in *The Times*, April 6 1996.

screen and their heads echoing to the disco beat,”¹⁷⁴ and “are not given to ‘joining’ anything” beyond the “style club”. Towards the end of this *Thought* he balances his “bleak picture of young people and the Church” with descriptions of churches:

.....where they are present in large numbers, active, participating and affirmed. Certainly if you try to get a seat in some of Oxford’s city centre churches in term time you’d take some convincing that young people have deserted the church.¹⁷⁵

Whilst it is true that he rarely uses pictorial language, it does play a significant role in the structure of this particular *Thought*.

A third *Thought* on “Marriage and Divorce”, delivered on 20th April 1996, focuses on “love, sacrifice or trust” and does not appear to have any explicit examples of pictorial language. This approach stands in sharp contrast to a *Thought* for the bank holiday weekend on 28th May 1996. He builds a composite picture of a “fairly typical British bank holiday” including “frustration over traffic jams.... and generally lousy weather.”¹⁷⁶ Later he depicts a couple “slumped in front of the television.” These pictures add colour to this fourth *Thought* which aims to encourage listeners to go beyond the bank holiday “sea of troubles”.¹⁷⁷

A fifth and final *Thought* reflects imaginatively on the start of a “full-time weather channel on TV”.¹⁷⁸ At the heart of this broadcast from 3rd June 1996 are three images of red skies and Jesus’ critique of those “short-sighted religious leaders” who can “interpret the appearance of the sky, but cannot interpret the signs of the times”. Winter argues that these leaders “failed to see the wood for the trees”. In this *Thought* he draws upon the vivid language of the New Testament,¹⁷⁹ and links it neatly with the fact that the listeners are about to hear Ian McAskill’s weather forecast. As a further encouragement to his listeners to read the signs of the times

¹⁷⁴ David Winter, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today*, BBC Radio 4, 13 April 1996.

¹⁷⁵ David Winter, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today*, BBC Radio 4, 13 April 1996.

¹⁷⁶ David Winter, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today*, BBC Radio 4, 28 May 1996.

¹⁷⁷ David Winter, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today*, BBC Radio 4, 28 May 1996.

¹⁷⁸ David Winter, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today*, BBC Radio 4, 3 June 1996.

¹⁷⁹ Luke 12:54-56 and Matthew 16:2-3.

and not simply to live for the moment, he concludes that: "to ignore the consequences for tomorrow of what we do today is to walk into that future naked."¹⁸⁰ This is a simple, graphic and powerful image, and further illustrates how Winter makes use of pictorial language which is not cluttered by unnecessary adjectives.

iv. Evaluation

On the basis of this brief consideration of five of Winter's *Thoughts* a number of points are raised. First, as is the case with Tilby and Blue, pictorial language is by no means the only device he uses in his broadcasts. Secondly, only one of these five broadcasts does not employ pictorial language at all, but four out of five make at least some use of this device. Thirdly, it is always used with discipline and restraint. In short, he differs from Tilby and Blue in that he does not rely on developed pictorial language. Rather than painting verbal pictures himself, he calls up pictures in the listener's mind. It is almost as if he holds up a photo from the newspaper and says "Remember this shot? "

Like Tilby and Blue he is not afraid of naming "God" in his talks, but he is constrained in his explicit references to God. In eight of his *Thoughts* broadcast between April 1995 and August 1996 "God" is only mentioned 18 times, an average of 2.25 per broadcast. In three of those talks "God" is not explicitly named. The highest number of mentions is to be found in his *Thought* on 4th March 1995; it has seven references to God. In it he reflects on the Northern Ireland cease-fire and concludes with a gentle encouragement to pray for: "a new loyalty: to that greater God than the God of battles, the God of truth and peace."¹⁸¹ Whilst he mentions God less often than Tilby does, he also refers to Jesus 8 times, twice as many as Tilby, and an average of once a broadcast.

¹⁸⁰ David Winter, *Thought for the Day*, on *Today*, BBC Radio 4, 3 June 1996.

¹⁸¹ David Winter, *Thought for the Day*, 4 March, 1995.

In the light of these observations and the earlier discussions, David Coomes' description and evaluation is useful:

David Winter is one of the two or three evangelical voices we have, who manages to say something that is authentically evangelical and biblical, without sounding as though he's proselytising, or preaching the gospel at the end of every sentence or end of every paragraph. So he takes a very conservative view, but he's always very imaginative in the way that he deals with it.....¹⁸²

One of the contentions of this section is that Winter is not only imaginative, but also disciplined in his *Thoughts*. He does not indulge in flowery adjectival descriptions, and instead he relies on tight verbal pictures, which allow the listener to re-create the picture in their own mind if they wish. There is a danger with aspects of Winter's approach, as certain allusions to pictures from the news may fail because his listeners did not see them. Or other allusions may carry negative associations for particular listeners. For example, reference to Belfast street-scenes may provoke painful memories for bereaved parents.

The fact, however, that Winter does draw on such images and pictures of "empty jars", "red skies", and crowded Oxford churches suggests that his self-evaluation, "I don't think I've gone in for much in the way of 'visual imagery'," may demand a small qualification. Whilst, he does not usually develop his pictorial language so much as Tilby and Blue, his *Thoughts* often gain colour and clarity through his highly compressed word pictures.

Conclusion

At this stage in the discussion it is important to emphasise that *Thought* can be a communicative failure, and the use of pictorial language does not guarantee success. Even established figures in religious broadcasting, such as Tilby, Blue and Winter are

¹⁸² David Coomes, Recorded Interview 19 Dec., 1996. Winter may have "doubly retired", both from the BBC and from full-time work as a parish priest, but as an experienced broadcaster in his sixties he is speaking as "one of us" to a Radio 4 audience with an average age of over 53.

by no means faultless broadcasters. They themselves admit that they can sometimes alienate some of their audience.¹⁸³ This may partially reflect individual listeners' bias, it may also highlight their weaknesses as broadcasters. There are lessons to be learnt from their mistakes, such as Tilby's over-abstract discourse, Blue's studied spontaneity and Winter's compressed imagery.

This chapter has, however, primarily focused on their strengths. In particular it has been argued that pictorial language *still* has a significant role to play in religious radio broadcasting in the United Kingdom. It has been argued that in different ways "painting pictures with words" is an important element in the work of at least three regular contributors to BBC Radio 4's *Thought for the Day*. It is, however, more than simply a device to add colour and interest to a "lengthy" monologue. This device is used in different ways to extend the listeners' fields of discourse, and to encourage new thoughts about both theological and moral issues. God is often unashamedly named, and rather than being surrounded by theological jargon, is located in the context of pictures about everyday life.

These conclusions hold important lessons for preachers attempting to communicate orally and effectively today. As Tom Gardiner correctly asserts: "Religious information and the church context can easily get in the way of the religious communicator."¹⁸⁴ Each of the three broadcasters discussed in this chapter has demonstrated how pictorial language can be used by speakers to liberate themselves from the insider-discourse of a particular faith community.

This argument also underscores the relevance of the advice from broadcasters such as John Newbury, a former editor of BBC Religious Broadcasting and a producer of and contributor to *Thought*:

¹⁸³ It is important to emphasise that listeners may be alienated not simply by tedious / inappropriate broadcasts, but also because iconoclastic discourse may lead some to "switch off" in disagreement.

¹⁸⁴ Tom Gardiner, on "Songs in Space" in *The Church Times*' radio review, 29 Sept. 1995. He continues: "*Thought for the Day* on Monday had Bishop Richard Holloway, who began by telling us about his going to confession. I think you can talk like that to "the Sunday people", but it gives the rest a feeling of remoteness." I would suggest that even to "Sunday people", preachers who use inappropriate theological and/or abstract language can inculcate a "feeling of remoteness" amongst many of their listeners.

When you broadcast on radio you need to paint pictures with words, you need to tell stories, you need to eschew abstract concepts..... When you're broadcasting you only have one chance. There's no such thing as a rewind button.¹⁸⁴

On the grounds of the evidence cited in the earlier sections, it is clear that Tilby, Blue and Winter would echo the sentiments of this experienced broadcaster and contributor to *Thought*. Newbury asserts that it is important not only for broadcasters, but also for preachers, to "describe what you want people to see" by using "adjectives". To support his case, he points out that, for example, the author of the Gospel of Mark speaks not simply of the people sitting on grass, but on **green** grass.¹⁸⁵ The underlying contention of this chapter is in agreement with these points, and could be summarised in Newbury's words as: when you preach "you need to paint pictures with words, you need to tell stories," and in many cases "you need to eschew abstract concepts".

Angela Tilby and Lionel Blue are clearly part of the school who normally attempt to "paint pictures with words" and usually "eschew abstract concepts" when they are broadcasting. Preachers can learn from the way in which Tilby acts almost like a disciplined verbal iconographer shaping pictures on the basis of the images already lodged in her own colour-sensitive imagination. Preachers can also learn from the way in which Lionel Blue works like a pictorial story-teller, weaving everyday images together to create compelling narratives which aim to help us interpret our own situations and recognise that we are not alone in our difficulties. This illustrates Coomes' observation that one of Blue's strengths is his ability to root what he is "saying in human experience or a story."¹⁸⁶ It has been argued that both Blue's and Tilby's stories and insights into human experience are enlivened by their use of pictorial language. This is a useful reminder to preachers of the importance both of rooting discourse in concrete experiences or stories and of enlivening such speech with pictorial language.

¹⁸⁴ John Newbury, recorded private interview with Jolyon Mitchell in Mexico City, 12 October 1995.

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*, and Mark 6:39.

¹⁸⁶ David Coomes, Recorded Interview 19 Dec., 1996.

In both his theory and his practice, Blue echoes his former producer, John Newbury's reminder that radio is a "one to one medium", with listeners in "the bathroom, in the loo, in the lounge, in the bedroom and in the kitchen" and that "no one wants someone in their breakfast room to start preaching to them".¹⁸⁷

Visualising your audience is an important skill for successful communication on the radio. Preachers have a potential advantage over radio broadcasters in this area, as they can normally see their listeners. Eye to eye contact and the chance to assess how their words are being received through the body language of listeners is a useful tool in the communication process. Whilst preaching is not a "one to one medium", the act of stepping imaginatively into or even visualising the world of individual listeners remains an important imaginative move for preachers. It will help them to create verbal images which resonate with their listeners, as well as to prevent them from talking down to their congregations.

Preaching has another advantage over a radio *Thought*: time. Few sermons are as short as two minutes forty five seconds. Usually preachers have time to develop a theme more fully in ten, fifteen or even twenty minutes.¹⁸⁸ Nevertheless, this extra time can become an excuse for over-long, ill-disciplined or poorly constructed sermons. It has been shown above that Blue, Tilby and Winter all attempt to produce tight scripts. Coomes asserts:

It's not just a straight sermon style, but actually manages in two and a half minutes to say one thing, it's very important that it's one thing. It's not *Thoughts for the Day*, it's *Thought for the Day*. Well argued, well constructed.....¹⁸⁹

He himself argues that preachers can learn from this practice and become more disciplined and imaginative in their speaking.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ John Newbury, Private Recorded Interview with Jolyon Mitchell in Mexico City, 12 October 1995.

¹⁸⁸ See: Stephen Ward, "Preachers decide time is right to cut back on tradition" in *The Independent*, 3 May 1994. Ward reports on a survey that found that sermons are getting briefer. Survey not cited.

¹⁸⁹ David Coomes, Recorded Interview 19 Dec., 1996.

¹⁹⁰ David Coomes, Recorded Interview 19 Dec., 1996.

David Winter is not only disciplined, but also imaginative in his attempts to draw upon his listeners' "artificial memories." His pictorial language is perhaps the most elusive, since more than Tilby or Blue, he relies upon his listeners having already seen the picture. With "fire in his bones" about the message of the Christian faith, Winter acts as an interpreter, commentator and critic of various mass media stereotypes. He counters deserted churches, empty caskets and Christians without fulfilment by evoking compressed pictures of packed churches, empty tombs and faithful triple-jump champions. He speaks as an iconoclast, who, using familiar pictures, attempts to shatter media-created stereotypes of God, Church and Christians. In the light of the discussions in the third chapter Winter's re-interpretative approach provides further useful insights for preachers aiming to break open or to build upon electronic stereotypes.

Newbury's belief that "the listener must also be able to make connections"¹⁹¹ with the speaker finds explicit support in Winter's theory and practice. Winter's desire to make connections, and bridge divergent fields of discourse is rooted in his own passion for communicating the Christian faith. He wishes not simply to analyse problems, but also to offer solutions and insights which sometimes challenge the assumptions of commonly inhabited fields of discourse. This emphasis upon seeking to connect with listeners and offering alternative viewpoints from the prevailing mass media consensus represents two further useful insights for preachers.

In summary, this chapter has argued that pictorial language plays a significant role in the work of a verbal iconographer, a pictorial story-teller and a passionate interpreter who occasionally reaches for pictures to express his enthusiasm. It has been suggested that pictorial language is by no means the only verbal device that they employ, but that it combines with other approaches such as editorial self-discipline, storied vulnerability and conversational discourse to enable them to build bridges between themselves and their listeners. Listeners are often implicitly and explicitly invited to participate

¹⁹¹ John Newbury, Private Recorded Interview with Jolyon Mitchell in Mexico City, 12 October 1995.

imaginatively in the discourse.¹⁹² Compared with Wright and Lewis, the trio of Tilby, Blue and Winter are more tentative in their claims and apparently more apt to “wear their hearts upon their sleeves”. Using a term loosely adapted from Lindbeck’s categories, they could be viewed as “expressivists”,¹⁹³ attempting to use pictorial language as a means to extend, transform or even counter their listeners’ fields of discourse.

Preachers can learn from the variety of ways in which Tilby, Blue and Winter use pictorial language. On some occasions they use it as a bridge to go from one field where God is not mentioned to another where God is named.¹⁹⁴ At other moments they use it to demonstrate that embedded in the normality of everyday life there are, what Peter Berger described as, “signals of transcendence”.¹⁹⁵ In certain cases pictorial language acts as a “verbal icon”,¹⁹⁶ pointing beyond itself to “signals of transcendence”. It can also be used as a tool to uncover hidden values and lessons from the “school of suffering”.¹⁹⁷ Pictorial language has the potential therefore to perform a range of functions. These include acting as a bridge, as a signpost, as a “verbal icon” and as a

¹⁹² This important point finds support from American homiletician, William Hethcock, who persuasively argues that: “Rather than looking at a picture or watching a play from the outside, the [listeners (word missing)] must become part of the scene the sermon sets. They must be helped actually to have an experience as they listen!” William Hethcock, “The Sermon as an Educational Event”, in *Scottish Episcopal Church Review*, Vol. 4. Number 1, pp.30-49, Summer 1995, see p.45.

¹⁹³ G. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-Liberal Age*, London: SPCK, 1984.

¹⁹⁴ See, for example, David Winter discussing the “Weather Channel”, *Thought, on Today*, BBC Radio 4, 3 June 1996. If speakers name God too soon or inappropriately, then many “secular” listeners may “switch off” from following the *Thought* to its conclusion.

¹⁹⁵ Peter Berger, *A Rumour of Angels*, London: Allen Lane - The Penguin Press, 1970 (1969). “I would suggest that theological thought seek out what might be called *signals of transcendence* within the empirically given human situation.By signals of transcendence I mean phenomena that are to be found within the domain of our “natural” reality but that appear to point beyond that reality.” p.70.

¹⁹⁶ W.K. Wimsatt, Jr., *The Verbal Icon - Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*, London: Methuen and Co., 1970 (1954). “The term icon is used today by semeiotic [sic] writers to refer to a verbal sign which somehow shares the properties of, or resembles, the objects it denotes. The same term in its more usual meaning refers to a visual image and especially to one which is a religious symbol. The verbal image which most fully realizes its verbal capacities is that which is not merely a bright picture (in the usual modern meaning of the term image) but also an interpretation of reality in its metaphoric and symbolic dimensions. Thus: *The Verbal Icon*.” p.x. (*Italic and plain script has been reversed from the original text.*)

¹⁹⁷ See, for example, Lionel Blue, *Bright Blue - Rabbi Lionel Blue's Thoughts for the Day*, London: BBC, 1985, p.62.

teacher for listeners. It can also function parabolically, illustratively, or simply as a “wake-up call” for distracted congregations. Through pictorial language, and in other ways, each broadcaster is attempting not simply to connect with their audience, but also to expand their listeners’ fields of discourse, realm of meanings, and even horizons of faith. The argument of this chapter is that pictorial language, combined with a number of other skills, has an important part to play in these tasks, and that preachers would do well to learn from these three broadcasters’ approaches.

Chapter 6. **Lessons from America: Radio Preachers**

In the previous two chapters it has been argued that the strategies and practices of certain religious radio broadcasters can provide a number of valuable insights for preachers hoping to be heard in an audio-visual culture. It was, for example, emphasised that pictorial language represents but one, albeit important, potential bridging device between speakers and their listeners. Other significant approaches used by religious radio broadcasters include: an attempt to know their audiences, a conversational style of speech, and a use of stories which can engage their listeners' imaginations.

It was implied that one reason for particularly focusing upon pictorial language is that, used appropriately by preachers, it can contribute towards the effectiveness of conversational discourse, engaging stories and imaginative exegesis. Preachers can thus be aided to bridge the gap between their own theologically informed world view, and their listeners' understanding of the world which is often defined by more secular and everyday modes of discourse.¹

1. Introduction

This next chapter considers a contrasting approach to religious broadcasting situated in the different cultural context of the United States of America. It offers a number of significant negative and positive lessons for preachers seeking to learn from radio broadcasters. These insights will be explicitly discussed in this chapter's conclusion. The chapter will therefore move across the Atlantic to the USA and analyse aspects of radio preaching, a phenomenon that Garrison Keillor describes as an "extraordinary American oral tradition".² Many American radio preachers within

¹ This process has interesting parallels with those attempting to fuse what has been described as "the two horizons" in the area of hermeneutics. See A. C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980, and the seminal text by Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, New York: Seabury, 1975. Also cited in Chapter 5 n.46 of this thesis.

² Garrison Keillor, [Radio Programme] *Garrison Keillor's Radio Preachers*, BBC Radio 4, 10 August 1994, Jolyon Mitchell, producer.

this “extraordinary” oral tradition are operating in what has been described as a “world constructed and maintained in discourse”.³

Such comparisons to a different cultural situation from that of British religious radio broadcasting can be very illuminating. First, by looking at efforts made in a contrasting communicative context we can enhance our understanding and appreciation of features too easily overlooked when considering discourse in a more familiar setting. Secondly, these case studies vividly illustrate the impact different social and cultural contexts can have on the perceptions and work of broadcasters. More negatively, they show how easy it is to allow cultural assumptions and communicative idiosyncrasies to curtail or distort broadcasters’ and preachers’ ability to communicate effectively. Thirdly, with the rapid proliferation and fragmentation of radio, British radio is developing a number of common characteristics with American radio.⁴ Given these parallels, it will be worthwhile considering some of the experiences of American religious radio broadcasters both to learn from their strengths and to be warned by their mistakes. In order to identify such lessons for homileticians, this chapter will focus on a number of elements of these radio preachers’ discourse or “broadcast talk”.⁵

At first sight many of the examples to be discussed may seem to be heavily negative in their implications. The kind of discourse encountered seems alien and distant from contemporary British culture, creating obstacles rather than bridges to understanding. Nevertheless, what is portrayed has a raw vitality and liveliness which can perhaps be seen as a contrast to the calm urbanity exhibited by the broadcasters previously considered. This discussion will therefore act as a useful corrective. In particular, it will safeguard against an over-optimistic view of pictorial language. As suggested

³ Robert Wuthnow and Matthew P. Lawson, “Sources of Christian Fundamentalism in the United States” in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms - The Dynamic Character of Movements*, Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, editors, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994, p.41. In this section they are referring to “fundamentalists”, but as a majority of radio preachers fall into this category, it seems reasonable also to apply it to radio preachers.

⁴ For a development of this point see following section: “The Context and Character of Radio Preaching,” and in particular p.254.

⁵ Phrase borrowed from Paddy Scannell, editor, *Broadcast Talk*, London: Sage, 1991.

earlier, its use does not guarantee success. Other factors come into play in the communication equation.

i. Radio Preachers and Pictorial Language

The radio preachers to be considered undoubtedly use pictorial language in a variety of ways. It will be shown that, first, some use it autobiographically, to tell their own stories of faith in visual terms. Secondly, some preachers use it didactically, drawing upon biblical imagery to illustrate their message. Thirdly, such biblical pictorial language is sometimes appropriated and integrated into the speaker's autobiographical story. Fourthly, it will be suggested that such autobiographical, biblical or "integrated" pictorial language may not necessarily create a bridge, but in certain cases may even form a wall or barrier between the speaker and the audience. The point here is that whilst pictorial language has the *potential* to build a bridge between the broadcaster and the listener, this does not mean that it necessarily always will. In fact, at times it may even have the opposite effect. This is a salutary reminder for preachers hoping to communicate effectively in an audio-visual culture.

ii. Radio Preachers and "Insider-Friendly" Discourse

This chapter will not focus, however, exclusively upon radio preachers' use of pictorial language. First, some of those preachers to be analysed appear rarely to draw upon this device. Secondly, other distinctive characteristics of their broadcasting provide a range of important lessons for preachers. On the basis of this discussion, it will be suggested that other linguistic and para-linguistic factors can contribute to the effectiveness of oral communication. For example, it will be argued that if radio preachers simply employ an idiosyncratic style to which only members of their congregation may be used, they may unintentionally exclude many listeners who are not accustomed to a shouted sermon, to the banging of the pulpit or to other manifestations of verbal extremism. On this basis it will be suggested that radio preachers are often caught between their "insider-friendly" speech and their desire to

communicate using “outsider-friendly” discourse.⁶ This is also a tension which many preachers face today.

A broadcasting style and context which contrasts with the preceding two chapters has been selected intentionally in order to test some of the earlier conclusions and extend the insights for homileticians. In simple broadcasting terms the radio preachers of the notional American “bible-belt”, to be considered in this chapter, are stylistically a far cry from the broadcasts of a British “radio padre” in the 1940s or a “radio rabbi” in the 1990s. They do not “speak to the nation” or command as large listening figures as Wright or Lewis did, nor do they have to compete within a fast paced news and current affairs format as do Blue, Tilby or Winter. They are not part of a “public service” broadcasting system, and operate within a far more commercialised broadcasting system. Most of the radio preachers to be considered in this chapter see “no value in formal broadcast training”.⁷ They learn their broadcasting techniques through “informal apprenticeships” - by “hearing and watching others”.⁸

iii. Radio Preachers and the “Revival Tent”

Many American radio preachers not only employ an idiosyncratic broadcasting style which can act as a barrier to outsiders, but they also represent a theologically distinctive tradition. They are seen by some scholars as descendants of the revival tent tradition.⁹ Many American Radio preachers now operate from what could be described as an “electronic revival tent”. This theory found support from a radio preacher of over twenty years experience. J.B. Lineberry is an evangelist who built churches in Arizona, and has been broadcasting on the WHHV radio station in

⁶ The terms “insider-friendly” speech and “outsider-friendly” discourse refer in this context to forms of communication that will be easily translatable for those within the speakers’ own faith community and those outside of that community respectively. See also section 2 of this chapter.

⁷ Howard Dorgan, *The Airwaves of Zion, Radio and Religion in Appalachia*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993, p.7. [Hereafter referred to as: Howard Dorgan, *The Airwaves of Zion*, 1993.]

⁸ Howard Dorgan, *The Airwaves of Zion*, 1993, p.8.

⁹ According to Tom Long “Radioland” for the radio preachers is like a “big revival tent”. Tom Long private recorded interview with Jolyon Mitchell, 21 March 1994, in Princeton, NJ, USA.

Hillsville, Virginia, since 1972. Alongside his explanation for why he has remained involved in radio preaching for so many years is a reference to his commitment to tent revivals:

I've done it because of reaching people. I feel that you can reach more people by the means of radio than any other way. And I also go on tent revivals because I feel that you can reach more people that won't go inside of a church. They come to a tent, because it's different. You can draw people in that's never heard the Gospel.¹⁰

The intention of Lineberry's broadcasting and work in tent revivals is clear: to reach and convert people.¹¹ Note the close link in his mind between radio and tent revivals. Another related issue that this chapter seeks to explore concerns the forms of discourse which certain radio preachers use to try to reach their listeners. Behind this point is the question: How far do certain radio preachers adapt the discourse of the "electronic revival tent" for their audiences who are often immersed in a media-rich pluralistic environment?

As a way of investigating these related issues of pictorial language, "insider discourse" and "revival tent" speech, heard on what has been described as the "airwaves of Zion",¹² this chapter will be based largely on my own field work in the USA.¹³ In particular it will analyse the broadcasts of a range of American radio preachers whose work was considered on *Garrison Keillor's Radio Preachers*, a BBC Radio 4 documentary.¹⁴ It will be suggested that at times the discursive devices employed act as a bridge for listeners, while at others they unintentionally become a barrier which excludes those outside their particular "communities of discourse".¹⁵ This highlights the tension also touched on earlier: some radio

¹⁰ J.B.Lineberry private recorded interview with Jolyon Mitchell, 21 March 1994, at WHHV in Hillsville, Virginia.

¹¹ Lineberry believes that radio "will reach a lot of homes that don't even have TV. Also we reach a lot more people by radio in automobiles than you'd ever reach in a home." Notice the frequent use of the word reach.

¹² Howard Dorgan, *The Airwaves of Zion*, 1993.

¹³ For further details see the Introduction of this thesis, and in particular section iii on "Methodology".

¹⁴ Jolyon Mitchell, producer, [Radio Programme] *Garrison Keillor's Radio Preachers*, BBC Radio 4, 10 August 1994.

¹⁵ Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*, London: Routledge, 1994. p.24.

preachers appear to feel caught between being true to their own religious discourse and their desire to make it intelligible to those who do not share their "realms of meaning", or who do not belong to their "reference groups"¹⁶ or their own "discursive community".¹⁷

This tension will be reflected in two sets of case studies.¹⁸ First, the "Country Boys", selected examples of radio preaching from rural contexts will be analysed. Secondly, the "City Prophets", African American radio preachers from more urban contexts will be considered. "Country Boys" and "City Prophets" are terms used by some radio preachers to describe themselves. These case studies will be preceded by a more general contextualising discussion of this "extraordinary American oral tradition".

2. *The Context and Character of Radio Preaching*

For preachers to be able to learn useful lessons from the practice of specific American radio preachers it is necessary to investigate critically the communicative environment and character of their radio preaching. This second section will therefore challenge a number of over-simplified and stereotypical understandings of radio preaching. It will do this by describing the communicative context in which radio preachers operate. It

¹⁶ John C. Kelly, *A Philosophy of Communication*, London: Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture, 1981, p.140. He cites T. Shibutani's chapter on "Reference groups and social control" in *Human Behaviour and Social Processes*, editor, Arnold M. Rose, London: Routledge, 1962. Shibutani writes: "a reference group is that group whose presumed perspective is used by an individual as the frame of reference in the organisation of his perceptual field."

¹⁷ Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*, London: Routledge, 1994. Hutcheon writes: "I want to define these "discursive communities" in general by the complex configuration of shared knowledge, beliefs, values, and communicative strategies." p.91. See also: J. Gumperz, "The Speech Community", in Pier Paolo Giglioli, *Language and Social Context*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972, pp.219-231.

¹⁸ It is important to distinguish between who radio preachers *are* addressing and who they *want* to address. Many of the radio preachers interviewed expressed the desire to speak to a wide listenership, but the limited research in this area suggests that the majority of these broadcasters speak primarily to a small part of their own discursive community. In short, there is a discrepancy between stated objectives and achieved goals. See: Quentin J. Schultze, "The Invisible Medium: Evangelical Radio" in *American Evangelicals and the Mass Media - Perspectives on the Relationship between American Evangelicals and the Mass Media*, ed. Quentin J. Schultze, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1990, (hereafter referred to as AEMM).

will also identify a number of characteristics of the complex phenomenon of radio preaching. This critical introduction to the context and character of radio preaching will conclude with the outline of a notational method for capturing radio preachers' discourse in written form. These notations will provide some of the tools necessary for the development of the argument in the following sections of this chapter.

In contrast to the 1940s' British broadcasters considered in Chapter 4, radio preachers have, since the early days of American radio, operated within a highly fragmented and competitive broadcasting economy.¹⁹ "US radio moved quickly from being state dominated to a commercial medium".²⁰ The "proliferation"²¹ of radio stations and diversity of programme producers and broadcasters has been a characteristic of American radio over the last sixty years. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss in detail the fascinating history of American radio,²² but it is important to underline how different the predominantly²³ commercial American model is from the public service model from which British radio broadcasting evolved. American radio preachers are part of what could be described as an

¹⁹ This "fragmented and competitive" broadcasting context is highlighted in Mark Ward's account, *Air of Salvation - The Story of Christian Broadcasting*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994. Ward writes from a viewpoint which sees "evidence of God's hand through the development of religious broadcasting" in the USA. This particular understanding is reflected, for example, in the way he plots how NBC, CBS and ABC banned gospel broadcasts, and how this ban was lifted.

²⁰ Peter M. Lewis and Jerry Booth, *The Invisible Medium - Public, Commercial and Community Radio*, London: MacMillan, 1989, p.30. (See Chapter 3: "Free for All: The American Model".)

²¹ Michael C. Keith, with Joseph M. Krause, *The Radio Station*, Third Edition, Boston: Focal Press, 1993, p.13. "Although specialisation saved the industry from an untimely end over three decades ago, the proliferation in the number of radio stations, (which nearly quadrupled since 1950) competing for the same audience has brought about the age of hyperspecialization. Today there are more than one hundred format variations in the radio marketplace, as compared to a handful when radio stations first acknowledged the necessity of programming to a preselected segment of the audience as the only means to remain in business."

²² See: Erik Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel: A History of Broadcasting in the United States to 1993*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966; and Erik Barnouw, *The Golden Web: A History of Broadcasting in the United States, 1933-1953*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968.

²³ See: Ralph Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America - A Political History*, London: Sage, 1996. Engelman argues that the "imperatives of the state and market impinged on the independence of NPR [National Public Radio], which was chartered as a non governmental, noncommercial entity. American public broadcasting did not attain the degree of independence enjoyed by the BBC." p.129. This study highlights, however, that public service broadcasting still developed within a broadcasting context dominated by commercial imperatives.

electronic “divine supermarket”,²⁴ which, extending the analogy, is found within an extensive “electronic mall”. Radio Preachers in America buy time or pay the radio stations for the privilege of broadcasting, whilst contributors in the UK today, such as Blue and Tilby, are paid for their work on *Thought for the Day*.²⁵

Nevertheless, as the number of commercial and independent stations continues to grow,²⁶ and as more channels are created through digital radio²⁷ and deregulation²⁸ radio broadcasting in the UK looks as if it will take place in a context more like the highly fragmented, free-market American situation. This means that, even though there still remains a gulf between the American and British broadcasting contexts, understanding and interpreting the American experience is increasingly relevant to those concerned with developing religious broadcasting in the UK, as well as those preachers keen to learn from religious radio broadcasting.

Radio Preachers, however, can all too easily be portrayed as an irrelevant and discordant sound in the American mass media context. Irrelevant, because most radio preachers work within what Quentin Schultze describes as the “religious radio ghetto”.²⁹ Discordant, because many only speak to the ghetto from the ghetto about

²⁴ Ruthven Malise, *The Divine Supermarket: Shopping for God in America*, London: Vintage, 1991. “With its increasingly mobile and heterogeneous society, religious America has become a divine supermarket where a church can be found, adapted or invented, to suit almost any taste.” p.307.

²⁵ It is hard to imagine contributors to *Thought for the Day* being required to buy time, unless there is a radical shift in how the BBC is to be funded. Such a major shift in funding looks highly unlikely in the near future, especially after the publishing of the White Paper on the funding of the BBC on 6 July, 1994. “The main points included confirmation that the BBC would not be privatised in any way, and would keep the license fee.” Chris Horrie and Steve Clarke, *Fuzzy Monsters - Fear and Loathing at the BBC*, London: Mandarin, 1994, p.287.

²⁶ Colin Seymour-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991, pp.80-81 for launch dates of ILR stations.

²⁷ Andrew Crisell, *Understanding Radio*, Second Edition, London: Routledge, 1994. See especially chapter 2 for a useful outline of “The History and Development of radio in Britain”, pp.17-41. This concludes with a concise discussion of the advent of digital audio broadcasting (DAB), pp.40-41.

²⁸ “Deregulation of public service broadcasting services” is also a global reality according to Héctor Schmucler. In a response to a paper by J.M. Barbero, “Cultural decentring and palimpsests of identity”, at a consultation on “Fronteras Culturales / Cultural Boundaries” at The University of Stirling, 16-18 October 96, he spoke of the “fundamental deregulation of public service broadcasting services”.

²⁹ “FM radio, religious recordings, and programme time sales - conspired to turn evangelical radio into a religious ghetto.” AEMM p.175.

the ghetto in the language of the ghetto.³⁰ The result of such in-group language is that most radio preachers have tiny audiences, serve a “small religious subculture”, and frequently fail “to attract even their own kind to the medium”.³¹

This marks a sharp contrast with the preachers of the “golden age of radio”,³² where the likes of Father Charles E. Coughlin³³ and Charles E. Fuller attracted millions of listeners.³⁴ For example, “when a Philadelphia station asked its listeners if they would like to hear Coughlin or the New York Philharmonic on Sunday afternoons, the vote ran Coughlin 187,000, Philharmonic 12,000.”³⁵ Charles Fuller was also extremely popular, drawing an estimated audience of 20 million.³⁶ According to broadcasting historian Mark Ward: “At the peak of his radio ministry in 1943, Fuller was heard on more than a thousand stations at a cost of about thirty-five thousand dollars per week.”³⁷

³⁰ “Christian Radio: Breaking Out of the Gospel Ghetto,” *Christianity Today*, 29 June 1979, p.32.

³¹ AEMM, p.172.

³² Mark Ward, *Air of Salvation - The Story of Christian Broadcasting*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994, p.53. For a more critical reading of religious radio see: R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God - American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp.231-235 (liberal protestants & radio) and pp.245-7 (evangelicals & radio).

³³ L.B. Ward, *Father Charles E. Coughlin*, Detroit: Tower Publications, 1933, represents an early and the only extensive biography of this “pioneer radio preacher”. According to Leonard I. Sweet, “There is a desperate need to understand Charles E. Coughlin”. Leonard I. Sweet, ed., *Communication and Change in American Religious History*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993, p.60.

³⁴ *ibid.*, pp.59-60. Father Charles E. Coughlin garnered a radio audience of over 45 million. p.60, whilst Charles Fuller’s “Old Fashioned Revival Hour” broadcast in the 1940’s had an estimated audience of over 20 million. (See also AEMM, p.177.)

³⁵ Tom Lewis, *Empire of the Air - The Men Who Made Radio*, New York: Harper Collins, 1991, p.238. “Often implying anti-Semitism, he [Coughlin] denounced international bankers, blaming them for the depression and suggesting, “Democracy is over”.”

³⁶ Mark Ward, *Air of Salvation - The Story of Christian Broadcasting*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994, p.56, cites Fuller himself: “Some people say I reach 20 million people, I don’t know.”

³⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 55-56. A number of factors have contributed to the decline of religious radio audiences. These include: the fragmentation of the market, the segmenting of audiences, the advent of television and alternative forms of mass communication, and the “secularisation of parts of the audience”.

The juxtaposition of these statistics from fifty years ago with the suggestion that American religious radio now has “the smallest audiences”,³⁸ also illustrates how radio preachers, a significant element for many religious stations, rarely attract mass audiences. Whilst it is possible to view radio preaching as a “dying art”³⁹ or a “fading phenomenon”,⁴⁰ which has little relevance for those homileticians concerned with learning from religious radio, it will be argued later in this section that some of these evaluations are over pessimistic. Even if this diagnosis of radio preaching is entirely accurate, I would contend that preachers can also learn from examples of less than successful religious radio.

i. Radio Preachers Stereotyped

In order to be open to such lessons, however, it is important that homileticians are not satisfied with stereotypical portrayal of radio preachers. There is a real temptation to view radio preachers in the same light as deceitful television evangelists or corrupt travelling preachers. Following the “general discredit brought on televangelism in 1989 by the spate of scandals involving the Bakker, Swaggart and Oral Roberts brigades”,⁴¹ it is easy to slip into the view that radio preachers fall into the same category. Echoes of Sinclair Lewis’ 1927 eponymous novel *Elmer Gantry*,⁴² the preacher who was a “completely amoral individual”, a “cheat, perjurer, womanizer, drunkard”,⁴³ images of Burt Lancaster’s Oscar winning portrayal of the scandalous Elmer Gantry in the 1960 film of the same name,⁴⁴ and tearful TV evangelists

³⁸ AEMM, p.172, “In the mid 1980’s the typical religious station generally attracted the smallest audiences of any local stations. Most religious stations were not even included in local audience measurements by the major research companies.”

³⁹ Tom Long, Private Recorded Interview with Jolyon Mitchell in Princeton, 21 March 1994.

⁴⁰ Howard Dorgan, *The Airwaves of Zion*, 1993. Dorgan also argues that “the phenomenon may be dying.” p.23. See also p.5 and p.208. It is important to note, however, that he is referring more specifically to the “airwaves-of-Zion” phenomenon, one element of which is radio preaching.

⁴¹ Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God, The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World*, Trans. by Alan Braley, Oxford: Polity: 1994, p.202.

⁴² Sinclair Lewis, *Elmer Gantry*, New York: Harcourt, Brace 1927.

⁴³ Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God, The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World*, Trans. by Alan Braley, Oxford: Polity: 1994, p.107.

⁴⁴ Derek Elley, editor, *Variety Movie Guide*, 1994, London: Hamlyn, 1993, p.225 on *Elmer Gantry*, directed by Richard Brooks in 1960 for United Artists. “Burt Lancaster pulls out virtually all the stops as Gantry to create a memorable characterization.”

confessing past misdemeanours, have become the “typical representative[s] of fundamentalism as portrayed by intellectuals.”⁴⁵

It is possible, by superficial or highly selective listening to some of the techniques employed by certain radio preachers, to find support, for a heuristic simplification of reality. The Reverend Ike, with his headquarters in Harlem, New York, for example, employs pictorial language and his slow, mesmerising voice to encourage a more positive attitude towards giving money:

And now I let down the money-hook, of faith and feeling, into the deep subconscious waters of my mind. And I’m fishing around for money, aaaahhh, here it is, I feel money, tugging at my line [laughs], this is a big one [laughs and volume increases] this is a **BIG MONEY FISH**.⁴⁶

His immediate audience, as opposed to his radio audience, repeat each phrase after him. The resulting broadcast sounds as if he is seducing his live audience, and by extension his radio listeners, into recreating these images in their mind. This extreme example could be used to further reinforce the stereotypical view of radio preachers as involved in a “sinister” discursive practice.⁴⁷

Such stereotypical portrayals of the radio preacher as the “poorer, but equally corrupt sister” of the television evangelists needs to be challenged. Howard Dorgan correctly asserts:

There are few comparisons between the big-money, high-tech world of televangelism and the world of the airwaves of Zion..... the airwaves-of-Zion preacher is operating over a medium far less expensive to access than that over which the televangelist is heard; nevertheless, I am convinced that there are considerable differences between the value bases of these two electronic church phenomena. Among airwaves-of-Zion exhorters I sense a genuine reluctance to

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.107.

⁴⁶ Jolyon Mitchell, producer, *Garrison Keillor’s Radio Preachers*, BBC Radio 4, 10 August 1994.

⁴⁷ Ailsa Tomkinson, *Pervert, Puritan or Prat - Discussions of Christianity in Popular Broadcasting*, Edinburgh: Unpublished M.Th. Dissertation, Edinburgh University, 1996, uses the “sinister” discourse category to good effect.

talk about money on or off the air, as if such discussions would detract significantly from their evangelistic missions..... it [the airwaves-of-Zion movement] has not been accused of stealing followers, finances, and other forms of support from local churches, a charge that has become controversial even for the larger electronic church; and it has not given rise - or is it likely to do so - to any scandals that have swept the nation.⁴⁸

This assertion finds support in various interviews carried out by this author.⁴⁹ The distance of many radio preachers from television evangelists is considerable and therefore the idea that seductive voices and enticing pictorial language are dangerous tools employed for the extortion of money by most radio preachers is simply incorrect.

ii. The Radio Preachers' Broadcasting Context

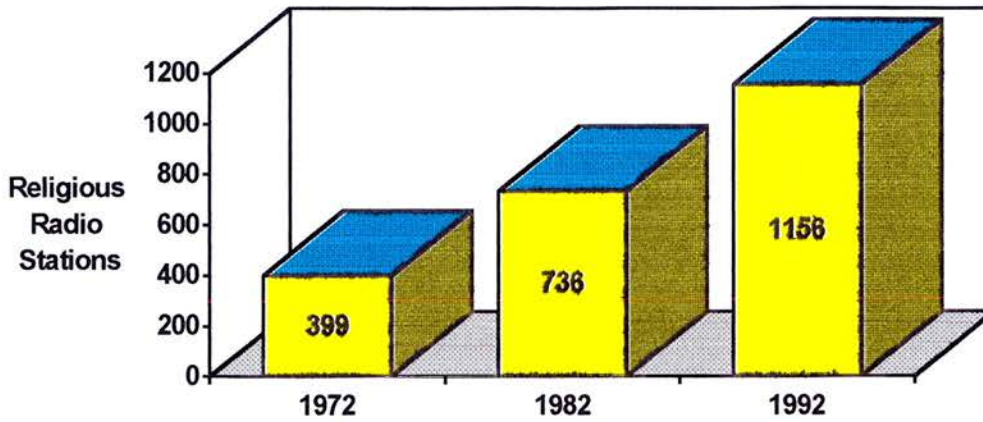
These stereotypical views of religious radio in America, and especially radio preaching, as discordant, dying or even dangerous, ignore other certain significant factors. First, the number of religious radio stations has been steadily increasing (see below); some go further and argue it has been "mushrooming",⁵⁰ over the last two decades.

⁴⁸ Howard Dorgan, *The Airwaves of Zion*, 1993. pp.19-20. Dorgan highlights the distinctive nature of these two phenomena: "In fact the only similarities might be that both deal with religion and do so - generally speaking - at a highly emotional level. The airwaves-of-Zion movement has no access to expansive markets, domestic or foreign; it has raised no huge sums of money, except in some very broad collective sense; it has created no super-preachers; it has established no educational institutions, hospitals, broadcasting systems, or extensive broadcasting networks; it has instituted no publishing houses or other large-scale commercial operations; it has played no highly visible role in promoting a religious-right political agenda, even though it does support many of the individual positions taken by conservative groups....."

⁴⁹ For example, 64 year old Pastor Irving Gallimore, pastor of the Skyline Independent Baptist Church, claims that he "never asked for money on the air", and he has been broadcasting for over 30 years. He relies on his church to support his broadcasting. (Private recorded interview by Jolyon Mitchell, 24 March, 1994, at Hillsville, Virginia.)

⁵⁰ See: John Kennedy, "Mixing Politics and Piety", *Christianity Today*, Vol.38, No.9, 15 August, 1994, p.42. "Christian radio has mushroomed to the extent that it is now the third most-common format on the dial, behind country and adult contemporary. The National Religious Broadcasters Association says 1,600 stations - one in ten - have a Christian format..... the regular core audience is between 3.5 million and 4 million." Also cited by James Werning, *Seeking the Peace and Prosperity of the City - A Challenge for Christian Radio in the United States*, Edinburgh: Unpublished M.Th. Dissertation Edinburgh University, 1996, p.14.

Chapter 6. Diagram 1: The Increase of Religious Radio Stations in the USA.



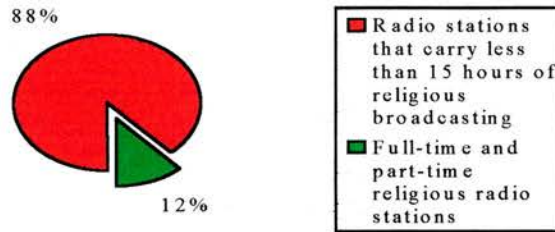
The above chart illustrates this “mushrooming”. In 1972 there were some 399 stations carrying 15 hours of religious programmes or more each week in the United States. In 1982 this number had nearly doubled to 736. By 1992 it had increased to 1156 stations.⁵¹ This trend looks set to continue with the number of full-time and part-time religious radio stations increasing to 1566 in 1994.⁵²

The chart on the following page illustrates how some 12% of America’s 11,000 plus radio stations carry at least 15 hours of religious programmes per week.

⁵¹ Mark Ward, ed., *National Religious Broadcasters Directory of Religious Media*, Manassas, Virginia: National Religious Broadcasters, 1994, see “Religious Broadcasting Statistical Summary: 1972-1994,” p.359.

⁵² *ibid.*, p.359. It is important to read these statistics of growth in religious radio in the context of the widespread growth of radio stations in the USA. In 1994 the total number of radio stations in the USA was 11,608 compared to 5,537 in 1965. See Jay Black and Jennings Bryant, *Media - Introduction to Communication* - (Fourth Edition) Dubuque, IA: Brown and Benchmark, 1995, p.269.

Ch.6. Diagram 2: The Percentage of Religious Radio Stations in the USA.



**In 1994, out of 11,608 American Radio Stations,
1, 566 Carried over 15 hours per week of Religious Broadcasting.**

On this basis, religious radio cannot yet be described as ready for preservation in the broadcasting museum. These statistics alone do not, however, undermine the assertion that radio preaching is a “fading phenomenon.”

Secondly, these figures do suggest that both stations and broadcasters still have faith in religious radio. Howard Dorgan’s prediction that many more central Appalachian AM “station owners and/or program managers” will “become embarrassed by their airwaves-of-Zion⁵³ offerings and seek ways to phase out that type of programming,”⁵⁴ needs to be qualified by the fact that many radio stations’ owners and managers outside this region believe that radio preachers and teachers are valuable customers.⁵⁵

One station manager based in New Orleans admitted that he had changed station policy and now accepted the broadcasts of radio preachers, partially because it was more lucrative than his previous music driven schedule.⁵⁶

⁵³ Howard Dorgan defines “Airwaves-of-Zion” as a “genre of locally produced live religious broadcasting that emanates from the AM stations of Appalachia; on Sundays these stations air a string of programs of preaching, singing, testifying, praising/glorifying, and other types of religious expression, all colored with a heavily provincial, fundamentalist, usually millenarian, “Come to Jesus” evangelism.” The “Airwaves-of-Zion” is, according to Dorgan, a “commonly understood and commonly employed” phrase in this setting. *The Airwaves of Zion*. p.3

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.32.

⁵⁵ A point confirmed in private recorded interviews both with the manager of the radio stations WNQM and WWCR George McClintock in Nashville, and with Fred Westenberger president and owner of WVOG in Metairie, near New Orleans, April, 1994.

⁵⁶ Based in New Orleans, asked to remain anonymous. Off the record interview, April, 1994.

Moreover, many faith professionals, mostly from the evangelical or fundamentalist wings of the church have been more than willing to buy time to proclaim their message.⁵⁷ Even a casual glance through the *National Religious Broadcasters Directory of Religious Media* (1994 or 1996) highlights both the large number of stations which are prepared to broadcast radio preaching/teaching and the wide range of radio broadcasters who are keen to produce preaching/teaching style programmes. In short, these statistics and observations indicate that radio preaching, in the widest sense of the phrase,⁵⁸ is by no means a fading phenomenon.

The homiletician and New Testament scholar Fred Craddock also views the current state of American radio preaching in positive terms:

Radio is making a comeback in a sense of becoming a more used vehicle for preaching than television. Television is very expensive, and television has gotten a bad reputation because some of the televangelists were guilty of an assortments of things. So the radio has the benefit of being an old traditional way of reaching the secular public. "How do I reach beyond the walls of the church?" Use the radio!⁵⁹

Thirdly, there are signs that certain broadcasters are becoming more aware of the media context within which they are working. "By the early 1990s," for example, "evangelical radio was an odd but changing collection of different stations with a growing desire to pull itself out of the religious ghetto".⁶⁰ Whilst there appears to have been no comprehensive investigation into the size and nature of religious radio audiences, some of the research that has been done suggests that the growth in the number of religious stations has been reflected in a small increase in the number of listeners.⁶¹

⁵⁷ See AEMM p.174. "In the late 1980s about 37% of all programming on religious stations was preaching or teaching." Schultze cites Paul H. Virts, "Surprising Findings in Christian Radio", *Religious Broadcasting*, February 1986, p.42.

⁵⁸ This chapter has a wider focus than Dorgan's study on the *Air-Waves-of-Zion*.

⁵⁹ Fred Craddock, Private Recorded Interview with Jolyon Mitchell in Atlanta, Georgia, 1 April 1994.

⁶⁰ AEMM, p.193.

⁶¹ Schultze writes in AEMM: "Audiences surveys documented that from 1977 to 1984 the national audience share for religious stations (the percentage of radio listeners who tune in to religious

In short, it appears reasonable to argue that the growth in the number of stations carrying religious programming has also led to an increase in the number of “electronic platforms” available for radio preachers broadcasting in the USA. In spite of small audiences and economic constraints, it is important to note that radio preachers from a large range of traditions are continuing to practise their art. Interestingly, by doing so they are preserving much of their theological and geographical individuality. On these grounds the image of American religious radio, and radio preaching in particular, quietly fading away, needs to be qualified. It remains a helpful resource for preachers seeking to learn both positive and negative lessons about how to communicate orally and effectively today.

iii. The Discursive Communities of Radio Preaching

Garrison Keillor provides a useful number of observations about the context and character of radio preaching:

It was always thought that mass media would gradually erase regional and ethnic differences - that radio and television would lead inevitably to a vast homogenisation in society - but this may not be true. The Southern radio preachers..... represent an extraordinary American oral tradition, an extemporaneous style of preaching that can be traced back to the early seventeen-hundreds, and radio has helped it survive. These are preachers from the backwoods, far off the beaten path, and if you wanted to go visit their churches, you'd have a hard time finding them. But you can find them on the radio across most of America.⁶²

Having challenged the stereotypes suggesting that radio preachers merely follow in the footsteps of television evangelists, or face rapid extinction, it is important to develop a more comprehensive characterisation of this wing of the electronic church. Radio preaching is a more complex, multi-faceted phenomenon even than Keillor suggests. It provides windows onto a number of American religious sub-cultures.

stations) increased from 0.89 percent to 1.76 percent, but much of that growth could be explained purely by the increase in the number of stations.....”

⁶² Garrison Keillor, [Radio Programme]*Garrison Keillor's Radio Preachers*, BBC Radio 4, 10 August 1994, Jolyon Mitchell, producer.

Some are to be found on the “backroads”, “off the beaten path”, preaching on the “airwaves of Zion”, others are to be discovered working in large cities. Some are to be found in what Mark Ward describes as the “hall of fame”⁶³ others are known to only a few local listeners. Whilst their varying expressions of faith reflect the wide range of Christian beliefs to be found in America, the vast majority of radio preachers are working from a fundamentalist or an evangelical position,⁶⁴ sometimes within a para-church organisation, or occasionally as independents. Leonard Sweet observes:

The way in which radio brought together orality and electricity in the charged atmosphere of evangelism is yet to be fully explored as a factor in the evangelical dominance of the airwaves, where today it is estimated that three-fourths of all religious broadcasting is either evangelical or fundamentalist.⁶⁵

The linking of “orality and electricity” by many of the theologically conservative radio preachers, also provides fascinating insights into the interaction between fundamentalists and modernity.

A small minority of radio preachers are to be found working from within the “institutionally based denominations”. Programmes such as *The Protestant Hour*,⁶⁶ based in Atlanta, or stations such as the Catholic Church’s *Sacred Heart Centre*, based in St. Louis, represent platforms for what could be described as “mainstream”

⁶³ Mark Ward, *Air of Salvation - The Story of Christian Broadcasting*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994, p.245.

⁶⁴ Radio Preachers may be the poor cousins within the “Electronic Church”, but they generally also support one party in what “Martin Marty has called the ‘two party system of American Protestantism’.” Their side, like their richer relatives in television, is usually “oriented toward conservatism rather than modernism, evangelism rather than social action, and independence rather than ecumenism.” Stewart M. Hoover, “The Meaning of Religious Television”, AEMM, p.233.

⁶⁵ Leonard I. Sweet, editor, *Communication and Change in American Religious History*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993, p.57. Geoffrey Hodgson also approaches the subject historically and argues that: “The vast majority of religious broadcasting in the United States came to be controlled by evangelicals.” Geoffrey Hodgson, *The World Turned Right Side Up - A History of the Conservative Ascendancy in America*, Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996, p.173.

⁶⁶ Gayle White, “The Protestant Hour - Long-running radio ministry broadcast nears 50th anniversary” in *The Atlanta Journal/ The Atlanta Constitution*, Saturday, Dec. 11, 1993, E8. “Since its debut at Atlanta’s Biltmore hotel in 1945, the Sunday morning program has delivered sermons on the topics of the day by some of the country’s best preachers. It now goes out to 300 stations in the United States and attracts a weekly audience of 1.25million”.

radio preachers.⁶⁷ *Sacred Heart*, for example, is more inclusive than many of the fundamentalist dominated stations. This applies both to its topics and speakers. The programme producers have recently covered issues such as youth gangs, teen sexuality and drug problems, and have invited a Mormon and a rabbi to speak.⁶⁸ Nick Barr, their associate producer at the *Sacred Heart* Centre, admits “we don’t limit our guests to Catholics, only.”⁶⁹

Certain stereotypical images of the radio preacher have already been qualified; it may also need to be fragmented to include the whole spectrum of characters and theologies involved in radio preaching. In spite of such diversity, all of them are attempting to broadcast an oral message in what Michael Warren has described as an “image culture.”⁷⁰ A lack of flexibility or openness within this rapidly evolving context, where audiences are increasingly used to communication through electronic images, may have contributed to many radio preachers being trapped inside the religious ghetto.

In this second section it has been argued that certain stereotypes of radio preachers should be challenged and that radio preaching retains a significant role in the complex and diverse world of American Radio broadcasting. The following series of case studies will investigate how far the discourse employed by certain radio preachers contributes, in the words of Wuthnow and Lawson, to a distinctive: “discursive style, a way of talking, of communicating something important to oneself and to one’s fellow believers about the sacred, about how to live, and even about how to act out

⁶⁷ “Mainline” is intended here as a descriptive rather than evaluative phrase. It is aimed to designate the institutionally based denominations (e.g. Catholic, Episcopalian, Methodist, Lutheran etc.).

⁶⁸ *Sacred Heart* programmes include one on teen sexuality: “Just Say ‘Yes’ ” which was aired on 27 Nov. 1992, and on youth gangs: “Mean Streets”, which was broadcast on 12 June 1992. “A Voice for the Hurting” was aired on 3 Jan. 1988 and included Dean Edwards, a Mormon out of Ogden, Utah and Rabbi Harold Kushner, author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*.

⁶⁹ Nick Barr, memorandum to Jolyon Mitchell, 12 April, 1994.

⁷⁰ M. Warren, *Communications and Cultural Analysis - A Religious View*, Westport, Connecticut: Bergin and Garvey, 1992, p.91.

one's values in broader social settings.”⁷¹ The “distinctive discursive style” of selected less well-known radio preachers currently operating in America's religious “radio-land”,⁷² will be analysed. As indicated earlier, such an analysis will provide a useful contrast with the methods employed by the “broadcasting élite” discussed in the earlier chapters. By moving the discussion into a radically different context and focusing on less “professional” broadcasters, the significance of pictorial language or conversational discourse for preachers may be tested more thoroughly. The remainder of this chapter will therefore not focus on the “main-line” radio broadcasters to be found on programmes such as *The Protestant Hour* nor will it consider those broadcasters regularly found in the top ten religious programmes in America.⁷³ Instead, by studying extracts from local American radio preachers, it will be possible first, to consider whether certain types of in-group pictorial language can become a barrier to communication and secondly, whether para-linguistic factors may block the effective use of pictorial language.

Since I made contact with over 100 religious radio stations, and carried out more in depth visits and interviews at another 20 stations, there was a wide choice of local radio preaching material from which to select. As a way of narrowing the focus within manageable parameters, I will, as already indicated, limit the discussion in this chapter to the radio preachers who appeared on *Garrison Keillor's Radio Preachers*. I will also draw on extracts from private interviews with the preachers themselves and recordings of their preaching not heard on the programme itself. The central criterion for inclusion in the programme was the extent to which they exemplified certain significant characteristics of American Radio preaching.

⁷¹ Robert Wuthnow and Matthew P. Lawson, “Sources of Christian Fundamentalism in the United States” in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms - The Dynamic Character of Movements*, Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, editors, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994, p.39.

⁷² “Radioland” is a word frequently used by radio preachers as a way of addressing their listeners: “you out there in radioland”. See also Howard Dorgan, *The Airwaves of Zion*, 1993, p.3.

⁷³ See the useful study by James Werning, *Seeking the Peace and Prosperity of the City - A Challenge for Christian Radio in the United States*, Edinburgh: Unpublished M.Th. Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1996.

iv. Recording Radio Preachers' Oral Texts in Written Form

One of the most significant and memorable characteristics of this form of radio broadcasting was the verbal extremism, both linguistic and vocal, of certain radio preachers. This is hard to capture in a written form. There is a sense in which some of their discourse has to be heard to be believed. Only by listening to *Garrison Keillor's Radio Preachers* would it be possible to catch a more complete audio-picture of their broadcasting style. I will attempt, however, to show something of this by using notations.

According to Thomas Lindlof there is "no one set of speech-text conventions that all analysts follow".⁷⁴ In the following sections I will be highly selective in my use of prosodic⁷⁵ and general speech notations.⁷⁶ As a way of illustrating textually how certain radio preachers speak, I will follow the typographical conventions set out in the diagram on the following page. This has been adopted from a range of sources.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Thomas R. Lindlof, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, London: Sage, 1995, pp.211-2. Lindlof cites "Common Speech-Text Notations" by Peter G. Stromberg, "Ideological Language in the Transformation of Identity", *American Anthropologist* 92:1, pp.53, 55, March 1990.

⁷⁵ John J. Gumperz, editor, *Language and Social Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, p.xi. Gumperz provides a useful introductory note on prosodic conventions.

⁷⁶ Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts*, London: Routledge, 1992, cites a system used in transcribing a "Baptist sermon which alternates between chant and sequences of lines in relative repose", p.205.

⁷⁷ Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts*, London: Routledge, 1992, pp.205-206; Thomas R. Lindlof, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, London: Sage, 1995, p.212; and Paddy Scannell, editor, *Broadcast Talk*, London: Sage, 1991, p.vi.: Transcription Conventions.

Key to Transcription Conventions Used in Following Sections:

1. **Standard Times New Roman Type:**
Ordinary conversational volume and intonation
 2. **Boldface Type:**
Increased volume and intonation used for dramatic / projected speech
 3. **BOLDFACE CAPITALS:**
Greatly increased volume and intonation range
- Underlining words or syllables: words / syllables spoken with emphasis
- * pounds or thumps rostrum / pulpit
- +hah+ loud expulsion of breath that punctuates chant / sermon
- # # bounds quickly spoken speech
- [] bounds transcriber's comments

These notations will be used sparingly and only when they advance the general thrust of the argument, for example, if it is believed that the volume, intonation or other para-linguistic factors are creating a barrier to understanding the meaning of the radio preacher's message. Part of the reason for this emphasis upon para-linguistics and appropriate literary notation is to underline the importance of the issue of delivery.⁷⁸

3. Case Study One: "The Country Boys"

One of the objectives of the following two series of cases studies is to illustrate how particular modes of presentation can act as a barrier between listener and speaker, and can even change the message itself. Another objective is to demonstrate how certain American radio preachers employ pictorial language in such a way as to exclude outsiders from their discourse. It will be argued that their particular styles of

⁷⁸ See: Malcolm Coulthard, "The Significance of Intonation in Discourse", *Advances in Spoken Discourse Analysis*, London: Routledge, 1992, pp.35-49. Coulthard, who also edited this book, argues that "paralinguistic phenomena in general and intonation in particular are areas of language patterning which have received little attention from linguists."

delivery and their choice of a vocabulary rooted in biblical imagery may make it hard for them to be heard by listeners from outside their own discursive community.

In order to engage critically and sensitively with the exclusivist nature of much of their discourse, it is important to make an imaginative leap into their discursive worlds. Howard Dorgan provides assistance for those seeking to make such an interpretative move. In his fascinating ethnographic study, *The Airwaves of Zion*,⁷⁹ he graphically describes certain radio preachers from Appalachia. For example, Brother Arnold Noles of Neon on WNKY, a radio station at Neon, Kentucky, in May 1989 is described as an “impassioned speaker” who:

seemed to lose himself in exhortation. Standing in one spot throughout his sermon, he placed his hands on the long studio table, leaned over the microphone, and concentrated exclusively on his radio audience, whoever they might have been.⁸⁰

This author witnessed similar scenes in 1994, in small and often poorly equipped studios. Such descriptions also supports the case argued earlier that many of the radio preachers currently broadcasting in rural America, make a sharp contrast with the high profile TV evangelists made infamous in the 1980s. They are to be found away from the population centres, frequently “off the beaten path”, broadcasting to small local audiences. They “express their beliefs and communicate their passions through a regional vernacular that is often foreign to mainline denominations.”⁸¹ They frequently describe themselves in self-deprecatory tones, acknowledging their lack of education. Their audiences, in Appalachia for example, are seen by Dorgan as also “generally below the national average in educational and other socio-economic measures.”⁸² One radio preacher who is still preaching after 30 years on his local station described himself as only a “country boy” with “no college

⁷⁹ Howard Dorgan, *The Airwaves of Zion*, 1993.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p.121.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p.21.

⁸² *ibid.*, p.21.

education".⁸³ This humble refrain echoed through many of the rural radio preachers interviewed.

*i. The Singing Radio Preacher*⁸⁴

Another example of a preacher who saw himself as "good awle [old] country boy" was Curtis Stoops.⁸⁵ It took an eight hour drive West from Richmond, Virginia, into the Appalachian Mountains to meet him. He is based in Max Meadows, Virginia and has been radio preaching for over 12 years. He has "converted" his garage into a studio, where he has produced "hundreds" of shows for the local radio stations. His tape library consists of a large cardboard box overflowing with tapes. His studio, which for all its rough edges, he is proud of, acts like a magnet to dozens of other local radio preachers. He says they come down from the mountains to preach, to sing and to broadcast.⁸⁶

Stoops' radio preaching could be understood in a number of ways. First, he is part of what Nancy Ammerman asserts is an "evangelistic people". More specifically, he is a "pragmatic evangelist",⁸⁷ prepared to use the particular media which is most accessible and affordable in order to facilitate his mission. Radio broadcasting provides the best means by which to preach to a world which, in his view, needs to

⁸³ From recorded interview on 24 March 1994, with Irving Gallimore, pastor of Skyline Independent Baptist Church, Hillsville, Virginia at WHHV in Hillsville.

⁸⁴ The three active categories of preachers: "Singing", "Athletic" and "Blowing" reflect but one characteristic of their speaking. Patrick Gaffney's three categories for Islamic preachers provides an interesting parallel with the work of radio preachers: "i) Preacher as the Affirmation of Traditional Authority, ii) Preacher as Advocate of Religiously Inspired Modernity, iii) Preacher as Apologist for the Ideology of Islamic Fundamentalism." P.D. Gaffney, *The Prophet's Pulpit, Islamic Preaching in Contemporary Egypt*, Berkeley, London: University Press of California, 1994. I would suggest that many of the preachers considered in this chapter "affirm traditional authority", defend the "ideology" of Christian "Fundamentalism", but mostly act as critics of parts of "religiously inspired modernity".

⁸⁵ The Curtis Stoops story is told more extensively by Jolyon Mitchell in "Song of a Preacher Man", *Ariel*, London: BBC Staff magazine, 9 August 1994, p.20.

⁸⁶ Curtis Stoops, Private Recorded interview with Jolyon Mitchell at Max Meadows, Virginia, on 24 March 1994.

⁸⁷ Nancy T. Ammerman, "Accounting for Christian Fundamentalisms: Social Dynamics and Rhetorical Strategies" in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms - The Dynamic Character of Movements*, Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, editors, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994, p.149.

hear the words of a preacher.⁸⁸ Secondly, Stoops' small broadcasting community works independently of "mainline" denominations. In other words, Stoops himself is a radio preacher who fits within a "regional common man's phenomenon" which originates "from heavily independent religious subgroups that owe little or no allegiance to hierarchical structures".⁸⁹ These two factors, a desire to evangelise and a loyalty to his small independent religious subgroup, are reflected in his use of autobiographical and biblical pictorial language.

On the one hand, Curtis Stoops uses accessible autobiographical pictorial language in both his singing and his speaking, often moving without announcement from words to song, both of which are vehicles for his preaching. For instance, he nearly died of a stroke and this is reflected in lyrics from his song called *Too Many Treasures*. In flat and yet strangely mesmerising tones he transports his listeners into barren deserts, down ice cold rivers and through metaphors of trauma. This memorable use of pictorial language is "born out of a personal trouble",⁹⁰ in this case his stroke.

At the heart of these images is a message of rescue and relief. His speaking is passionate, full of hope, and at times lightened by humour. Perhaps most memorably, he describes in vivid detail an unsuccessful baptism. He fell in the river!⁹¹ As with many other rural radio preachers, behind these simple autobiographical verbal pictures lies the desire to evangelise, "to reach out" and to communicate the simple call to conversion. This rhetorical objective is perhaps distinctive in his use of pictures of hope, rather than judgement.

⁸⁸ Curtis Stoops Sermon, recorded 9 December 1993, Max Meadows, Virginia.

⁸⁹ Howard Dorgan, *The Airwaves of Zion*, 1993, p.21.

⁹⁰ Howard Dorgan, *The Airwaves of Zion*, 1993, p.204. Dorgan perceives that one of the common threads within his four case studies is that "missions -or the sense thereof- have arisen out of a bout of personal troubles. In each instance the individual or individuals adopted the respective spiritual path after a period of personal disturbances - some physical, some psychological - with alcohol figuring in all four stories".

⁹¹ Curtis Stoops Sermon, recorded 9 December 1993.

On the other hand, Stoops often employs biblical pictorial language and a “stylized sermonic technique” that is “distinctly Appalachian”.⁹² In a programme from 1993, much of his hopeful message would not have been accessible to a listener from outside his discursive community. He persistently uses religious terms such as “covenant”, “gentiles”, “plan of God” and “Prince of Peace” with no explanation.⁹³ His transitions between these apparently unconnected biblical images also make it difficult at times to follow the flow of his preaching. “This was a clear display of in-group language on an in-group audience. It probably reached none of those it was intended for. It never left the ghetto.”⁹⁴

These two sides of Stoops’ radio preaching, biblical and autobiographical, could be described as insider-friendly discourse and outsider-accessible discourse. The tension between these two strands within Stoop’s broadcasting is highlighted by his repetitive rhetorical style. Like many other Appalachian radio preachers, he tends to repeat words, phrases and images for emphasis.

At times, his repetition is built upon general rather than specific pictorial language. For example, in one broadcast he attempts to describe his listeners’ life in a “world” which is bristling with difficulty and to highlight the peace which only the “Prince of Peace” can bring. He speaks without a pause:

That world of trouble and sorrow,
that world of being upset continuously,
that world of having nerve problems,
that world of having financial problems,
that world that seems like things are just so tough that you
can’t make it through, but JESUS come,
the Prince of Peace,
THAT YOU MIGHT FIND PEACE, EVEN LIVING IN THE
MIDST OF THIS WORLD,

⁹² Howard Dorgan, *The Airwaves of Zion*, 1993, p.21.

⁹³ Curtis Stoops Sermon, recorded 9 December 1993.

⁹⁴ Schultze cites radio critic Jim Pennington who after listening to one religious station made this observation. See: “Christian Radio: Breaking Out of the Gospel Ghetto,” *Christianity Today*, 29 June 1979, p.32.

**WE CAN PUT THE WORLD BEHIND US WHEN WE'RE IN
JESUS CHRIST, WE CAN LET IT GO RIGHT BY.....#⁹⁵**

Curtis Stoops builds up a poetic crescendo in this breathless series of statements. Both his pace and his volume increase as he develops this theme. It is clear that he is attempting to step into the world of a listener who is in crisis, but he is also attempting to point them towards the biblical image of "the Prince of Peace". Notice how the "world" is placed in sharp contrast with the "peace" of Jesus Christ. In Stoops' eyes, one can only qualify for this peace by accepting that "You must be **born again**, and that's the only way".⁹⁶ This represents his, and many other rural radio preachers' central appeal.

It is a point he develops at length in a semi-dramatic, semi-shouting form, which is marginally quieter than the extract cited earlier:

Nicodemus said: "Why, how can I be born again? Can I enter in to my mother's womb a second time?" That's not what He's talking about! He's talking about inviting Jesus into your **heart!** That He'll give you a renewing of the mind, that you won't **no longer** be called the uncircumcision, **but you can be a called a very CHILD of God, no more aliens from God.....**⁹⁷

Even in this "quieter" extract, the force with which he hits each phrase gives the impression that he is passionately motivated to proclaim this message. Sometimes, however, his shouting style combined with his use of "insider language" blurs the clarity of his message.

Alongside this blurring through excessive volume, there is once again a combination of insider discourse and outsider-accessible imagery. In-group discourse includes words such as "uncircumcision" which have little pictorial resonance for outsiders; outsider-accessible language includes words such as "mother's womb", a universally

⁹⁵ Curtis Stoops Sermon, recorded 9 December 1993.

⁹⁶ Curtis Stoops Sermon, recorded 9 December 1993.

⁹⁷ Curtis Stoops Sermon, recorded 9 December 1993. This entire passage could be in bold as it is almost all at shouting level, but in order to distinguish the different levels I have graded each word.

familiar term. The picture of being born again and idea of being called “uncircumcision” illustrate how biblical categories represent a central source for much of Stoops’ broadcast talk.

The “born again” language from John 3 is also linked with an allusion to the Pauline concept of “renewing of the mind”.⁹⁸ This is a good example of how he is content to fuse images from Johannine texts and assertions from Pauline literature. This can be seen again in extended extract from later in the same broadcast:

I like that scripture, you know when you get into trouble. I like that scripture that talks about: “I know my sheep, and my sheep know my voice.” **Do you know the very voice of God?** “You know, I have **heard God speak**. A lot of people say well that’s the bible. It says: “You know we need a preacher, and he needs to be sent.” It says: “Faith comes by hearing!” And you know when you’re reading the bible, you’re not hearing it, but you’re reading it. **But when you hear the preacher or you hear someone that’s been CALLED, that’s been anointed, by the PRECIOUS Holy Ghost, then they can unlock the key of the MYSTERIES OF GOD, THEY CAN REVEAL THEM TO YOU.** #⁹⁹

This provides a fascinating insight onto some of the theological foundations of Curtis Stoops’ radio preaching. First, as argued above, at the heart of his message are the fusion of biblical quotes or paraphrases. Interestingly, like many other preachers, he again brings together a Johannine and a Pauline text.¹⁰⁰ Secondly, he has an extremely high view of the spoken or preached word of God. He even appears to place it above the reading of scripture itself, on the basis that “faith comes by hearing”.¹⁰¹ For Stoops, the aural nature of radio preaching is clearly part of its attraction to him. In an endearing example of confused metaphoric language he proclaims that an anointed speaker can “unlock the key of the mysteries of God”.

⁹⁸ Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”

⁹⁹ Curtis Stoops Sermon, recorded 9 December 1993.

¹⁰⁰ John 10: 4, 14 and 16 appear to have been amalgamated, confused or paraphrased. The same appears to be true of his handling of Romans 10: 14, 15 and 17.

¹⁰¹ See Romans 10:17, “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.” (RSV)

At first it appears Stoops' "primary audience"¹⁰² are in his eyes those "without hope", who need to hear a preacher. Towards the end of a broadcast recorded in December 1993, however, there is evidence that he perceives a more heterogeneous audience or a secondary group of listeners who are sympathetic to his cause. This is clear from his frequent use of prayer in his broadcasts. The divisions between preaching, prayer and singing, however, are not always clearly defined in Stoops' broadcasts.¹⁰³ Accompanied by music, which sounds similar to a tinkling saloon piano, he moves from preaching to prayer with little announcement.

Got a little baby and a mother we've been praying for all week. And we want you to reach out to that little child. We want to see it dead healthy. And we want to see that family together and happy. And we can see it in the name of Jesus..... **O God** how we need you today - can't do without you. [We] **need the power of the Holy Ghost, that you sit upon this world, that dwells inside of me, that dwells inside of these ministers as they come into the pulpit. O God pour that fire, let those bones get on fire on the inside, that they'll preach a sermon in the pulpit that men could not resist, that they'll come to you.**¹⁰⁴

Stoops uses the word "see" three times, as he appears to encourage his listeners to visualise prayerfully a restored infant. In active and graphic terms he describes the Holy Ghost who "sits" and "dwells", and ministers as they "come into the pulpit". In words which echo both the prophet Jeremiah and the broadcaster David Winter,¹⁰⁵ discussed earlier, he implores that the "bones get on fire on the inside." This is Stoops at his most pictorial, but with the synthesised piano music and the increasing force of his delivery it is easy to be distracted.

¹⁰² Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts*, London: Routledge, 1992. Finnegan makes a series of useful classifications of audiences. These include: a) Primary versus secondary, b) Integral versus accidental audience, c) Homogeneous versus heterogeneous audiences, and d) Mass or impersonal versus personal audience.

¹⁰³ Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts*, London: Routledge, 1992. Finnegan also highlights how boundaries between speech, chant and song are often "multi-faceted and relative". p.140. In other words distinctions between categories can be more complex than at first sight.

¹⁰⁴ Curtis Stoops Sermon, recorded 9 December 1993.

¹⁰⁵ See Jeremiah 20:9 and Chapter 5, section 4.ii. on David Winter in this thesis.

On the basis of the passages cited, it appears that pictorial language does play a role in his radio talk and singing, but a limited one. There is a strong sense of spontaneity and an apparent passion to include his listeners.¹⁰⁶ Stoops does use both autobiographical and biblical pictorial language, but he does not rely on it for effective communication, instead it is the force of his delivery combined with his “spontaneity”, his partial memory of scriptural verses and his obvious “personal involvement” in what he speaks, preaches and shouts about which is at the heart of his radio preaching. Whilst there is little explicit representational pictorial language in much of his spoken discourse, through a mixture of vocal force, biblical allusions and a passion for his message, he evokes the picture of a preacher earnestly attempting to persuade his audience to respond. How successful he is, represents an intriguing subject beyond the scope of this project.

ii. The Athletic Radio Preacher

Toby Powers is another preacher who seeks to evoke a response from his listeners. He is only twenty one years old and is already the minister of a small Congregational Methodist church in Union Hill, Georgia. He broadcasts regularly from the Gospel station WGMI in Bremen, also in Georgia. This is a small station, which claims a potential audience of 10,000 people. It is situated so close to the railway tracks, that the rumble of a train going by can often be heard on radio. The size and the location of the station does not deter Toby Powers in his extraordinary style of preaching.

Peter looked at the lord in the verse number five, of Mark chapter nine, he looked at him, he said “Master”, his first words were these: he said “MASTER, IT’S GOOD FOR US TO BE HERE” [laughs] “WOOOH !” he said, “IT’S SO GOOD FOR US TO BE HERE.” WHENEVER THE GLORY OF GOD COMES ON THE SCENE, erY’UR FIRST REACTION WILL BE *

¹⁰⁶ William Graham, *Beyond the Written Word - Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. Borrowing words from Graham’s fascinating study, it is possible to argue that Curtis Stoops’ “vocal word conveys with peculiar force a sense of spontaneity, participation, or personal involvement for the individual and the group through the emotional, sensual impact..... of texts read or recited aloud.” p.157.

**“I’M NOT WORTHY OF THIS”. BUT PETER SAID:
 “MASTER, IT’S GOOD FOR US TO BE HERE”
 erBLESS YOUR HEART, WHEN YOU REALLY SEE GOD’S
 GLORY, erYOU’LL REALISE IT’S A GOOD PLACE TO BE
 # when you’re seeing the glory of God. Amen. [Laughs]¹⁰⁷**

A written text cannot do justice to the unforgettable passion and intonation of Toby Powers. For a listener not used to this style of discourse, from outside Powers’ discursive community, it would be almost impossible to ignore the style of his broadcast talk. He also switches rapidly between the biblical story and his imagined listeners’ experience of seeing the glory of God. For this author Powers’ picture of the glory of God is overwhelmed by the excitement and pace of the speaker. For listeners who are more used to this style of discourse, his “energetic” approach may heighten a sense of the Glory of God.

There is an energy which borders on the comic to those outside his discursive community, and yet his usual speaking voice is calm, straightforward and normally modulated. He admitted, surprisingly:

I would say that I have mellowed some, and that I, I have slowed down some of my athleticism and some of my er acrobaticism in the pulpit. I don’t jump around and, and maybe run as fast and as hard and as much, and jump as many pews, and banisters, and pulpit as what I used to.¹⁰⁸

For Powers the main thing is that his “athleticism has slowed down to a great degree.”¹⁰⁹ He may not “swing from the banisters or rafters” as much as he used to, but he makes up for this with a verbal athleticism which leaves many listeners

¹⁰⁷ Garrison Keillor, [Radio Programme]*Garrison Keillor’s Radio Preachers*, BBC Radio 4, 10 August 1994, Jolyon Mitchell, producer. In 1994, Toby Powers had a 15 minute long programme every Tuesday and Thursday on WGMI - “Serving West Georgia and East Alabama”.

¹⁰⁸ Toby Powers, Private Recorded Interview with Jolyon Mitchell at WGMI, Bremen, Georgia, 5 April 1995.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

breathless.¹¹⁰ The contrast between Powers in the radio pulpit and Powers in conversation is striking. It is as if two different people are speaking.

Interestingly he admits he owes a debt to an American evangelist from earlier this century:

My hero has always been Billy Sunday and I have studied a lot of his works and things. Some people said that when he was seventy years old he was swinging from the rafters and preaching hard, and he was criticised often for preaching too dramatic, and too dynamic and too much on money even.¹¹¹

As an evangelist Billy Sunday “charmed the crowds with his baseball stories, saloon impersonations, and vaudeville antics”.¹¹² Powers’ radio preaching is not a precise copy of Sunday’s style, but he clearly moves into performance mode as he steps behind the microphone.

It is fascinating to see how the highly experienced broadcaster Garrison Keillor handled these recordings of Powers. Almost by counter-suggestion, Keillor invites his audience, who are about to hear another sermon by Powers’, to consider how this preaching would fit in a more “traditional” context. : “It’s hard to imagine sitting in an Anglican Church in London, York or New York and see the vicar lean out from his high Gothic pulpit and say:

You know folks lots of times we go through some hard things in this world, and we face some troubles and trials, we face some heart-aches, we face some tr-tribulations in this world. But let * me remind * you of something, let me remind you*, let me remind you:
* **There’s good times waiting on the other side. There’s good stuff waiting on the other side where Jesus is. And there’s so much glory over there.** You know sometimes we getting good

¹¹⁰ This clip has been played to six different groups of mixed age, nationality and background. Invariably they have displayed genuine surprise at the pitch and pace of Toby’s delivery.

¹¹¹ Garrison Keillor, [Radio Programme]*Garrison Keillor’s Radio Preachers*, BBC Radio 4, 10 August 1994, Jolyon Mitchell, producer.

¹¹² Joel Carpenter, “Billy Sunday”, in *Christianity in America - A Handbook*, editors Mark Knoll et al. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1983, pp.371-2. “William A. Sunday (1862-1935) was the nation’s most successful revivalist in an era when urban mass revivalism flourished.” p.371.

meetings here, and the bible even said: "We were allowed to sit with Christ in heavenly places on this earth." But folks let me remind you of something - **WOOOH**, that this ain't ev'n anything to compare with what is waiting on the other side. **Hallelujah**. Sometimes it gets so good I heard people say: "Well it don't get any better than this." It does too bless your heart. It's going to get so good till our bodies **we've got here won't even be able to handle it. God will have to give us a brand new one to be able to handle the glory that's a coming and waiting for us on the other side. # Amen.** Glory to God. Hallelujah.¹¹³

The juxtaposition between Keillor's and Powers's style highlights their radically different approaches to radio broadcasting, and more specifically their contrasting approaches to creating pictures with words. Keillor is gentle in his delivery, and he invites his listeners to make an imaginative leap. He encourages his audience to imagine a specific scene by describing an Anglican preacher leaning out over the "high gothic pulpit".

By contrast Powers uses more general term such as "good times", "good stuff", "glory" or the "other side" to illustrate his preaching which do not paint such a vivid picture. In radio production terms, he also has a faster and much more "up-front" or "in-your-face" style. He creates scenes through drama and re-enacted speech. He shifts, to borrow a phrase from the socio-linguist Erving Goffman, "from monologue to the enactment of dialogue."¹¹⁴ Behind these sermons is the expectation that one day some of his listeners will see the glory of God. As suggested above, his tone of voice and variation of pitch, combined with shouts of delight and ecstasy would probably make it difficult for an outsider, not used to this style of communication, to engage with the worlds he portrays. Overall, I would argue that Powers also uses little pictorial language, and relies on dialogue rather than markedly visual language to create "scenes". His extreme vocal outbursts make his radio preaching perhaps intriguing, but ultimately outsider-unfriendly.

¹¹³ Garrison Keillor and Toby Powers, [Radio Programme]*Garrison Keillor's Radio Preachers*, BBC Radio 4, 10 August 1994, Jolyon Mitchell, producer.

¹¹⁴ Erving Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981, p.241.

iii. "Blowing" Apocalyptic Radio Preachers

Many of the rural radio preachers are at their most graphic when describing how Jesus Christ will return and bring an end to this "restless" and "evil world". Brother Clarence Brown, for example, a Pentecostal minister based in Raven, Virginia, leaves his listeners in no doubt as to what will come to pass:

He is going to come with vengeance and with wrath,
 He is going to pour it out on a world that has forsaken him,
He is going to pour it out on a world that has denied him. ¹¹⁵

His pictorial language is drawn from biblical apocalyptic literature. In a passionate attempt to "warn the people to flee the wrath to come", he describes signs in the sun, moon, and earth..... the sea and waves roaring..... the sea turning to blood....." He even implies that the atomic bombs of the Second World War are "like the flickering of a candle" or "the lighting of a match....." compared to the destructive potential of this day of wrath.¹¹⁶

This view, of the imminence of the second coming and a world bound for destruction, is often combined with a negative evaluation of the general American public. Winnifred Garner, the owner of station WGMI in Bremen, Georgia, uses the simple picture of a baby, to combine with his complaint about the widespread lack of knowledge of the "Word of God". Notice also how he breaks his exhortation into "short, punchy, "haah"-accentuated lines."¹¹⁷

There's lots of people act like babies today, +hah+
 Act like they haven't grown an inch since God saved them, +hah+
Shame on you, +hah+
 If you're still a baby, +hah+

¹¹⁵ Brother Clarence Brown message "How will Jesus Come?" broadcast on WGTH. Neither Brother Brown nor staff at the station knew precise date, Spring 1994 was thought to be the most likely.

¹¹⁶ Also in "How will Jesus Come?" message, undated tape with J. Mitchell, Edinburgh University.

¹¹⁷ Howard Dorgan, *The Airwaves of Zion*, 1993, p.61. Dorgan focuses in this section on Appalachian Holiness-Pentecostal preaching. He argues that its "delivery is dominated by a high-volume, rapidly paced, but prosaic and emotionally explosive, exhortation that features a constant repetition of certain end-of-sentence exclamations ("Praise God!" "Amen!" "Hallelujah!" "Glory!" "Oh, Lord Jesus!" "Save us Lord!" "Praise his Name!")" p.61.

Bottled baby - I'm sorry for you, +hah+
 Somebody has to burp you every
 once in a while to make you, +hah+ er belch +hah+
 Something is wrong with you,
 Why don't you just come home? +hah+
 So many people knows more about movie stars,
 they know about the sport characters, +hah+!
 than they do about the word of God, +hah+!
 Oh I tell you friends, its come just about time for me to leave you
 again, but this is brother Winnifred Garner saying thankyou for
 letting me come in your place of listening.
 You tune in er - er - er - the tomorrow,
 same time, same station. May the good Lord be with you.
 And I want to say to you, since I have said different times before:
 We're planning on being back on the air tomorrow, but who knows?
 Jesus may come back in the air before I come back on the air.
 [More and more distant, as he moves away from microphone] ¹¹⁸

Winnifred Garner draws on a simple picture: a baby drinking milk. It echoes images to be found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians¹¹⁹, and the fifth chapter of Hebrews.¹²⁰ The picture, however, is updated to include "bottled-baby" and "burping on the back". This imagery is used almost to insult his audience, goading them into facing their spiritual immaturity. In Garner's eyes, part of growing up spiritually means facing the power of Hollywood, but he sees it primarily as a "false idol", which can distract people from the word of God.

Other radio preachers, both rural and city based, go further in their cultural critique. They see an America bound for the same destiny as the ancient Roman Empire: it is in terminal decline, as a tide of immorality is sweeping across the United States.¹²¹ This diagnosis may partially explain why so many preachers feel compelled to broadcast. Vernon Williams, a former alcoholic, now a preacher at Welcome Hill

¹¹⁸ Winnifred Garner, [Radio Programme]*Garrison Keillor's Radio Preachers*, BBC Radio 4, 10 August 1994, Jolyon Mitchell, producer.

¹¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 3:2 : "I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it;" RSV.

¹²⁰ Hebrews 5:12 ff. "You need milk, not solid food; for every one who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil." RSV.

¹²¹ This is a common theme for the relatively well-known deceased radio preacher, Dr J. Vernon McGee of Pasadena, California, in his *Thru the Bible Radio* series.

Baptist Church, Carrollton, near Bremen, believes that personal experience is a key factor for connecting with listeners who are in need:

You can't talk to a drug addict unless you've really been where they've been, and you can't talk to er, er an alcoholic unless you have been there. And by that, and through the experiences I've had, I can come to their level.....and let them see, and try to make them understand someone does care for them and understand them.¹²²

In this private interview Williams comes across as a thoughtful and restrained speaker. As a preacher Williams is as passionate as Toby Powers:

**Friend this restless world today, +hah+
 These hungry hearts, +hah+
 This suffering, +hah+
 In agony and in feet of the devil, +hah+
 Friend these folks today, +hah+
 Is starving to death, +hah+
 For the word of God, +hah+
 And friend we need to preach the Word, +hah+
 The Paul said: Be instant in season +hah+
 Out of season +hah+
 Reprove, rebuke, +hah+
 With all unsuffering doctrine, +hah+
 My friend, we need to preach, we need to preach JESUS..."¹²³**

Once again the radio preacher's phrases are punctuated by an explosive "haah" [signified by +hah+ in the extracts]. This is almost like tapping a "foot to keep time."¹²⁴ This "blowing" or "suck and blow" style is, according to the homiletician Tom Long, seen by the radio preachers as a sign that they are under the power of the Holy Spirit.¹²⁵ In other words a "haah" at the end of each line, is proof that they are literally blowing out the word of God as they speak. In all my interviews, however, I did not find any evidence to support this fascinating theory. Nevertheless, this is another example of a

¹²² Vernon Williams, [Radio Programme]*Garrison Keillor's Radio Preachers*, BBC Radio 4, 10 August 1994, Jolyon Mitchell, producer.

¹²³ *ibid.* In 1994, Vernon Williams was broadcasting every Sunday morning "The Open Door Broadcast" on WGMI in Bremen, Georgia.

¹²⁴ Garrison Keillor, [Radio Programme]*Garrison Keillor's Radio Preachers*, BBC Radio 4, 10 August 1994, Jolyon Mitchell, producer

¹²⁵ Tom Long, Private Recorded Interview with Jolyon Mitchell, 21 March 1994, in Princeton, NJ.

stylistic idiosyncrasy which has the power to distract and so create a barrier to those outside this small discursive community.

It is as if they imagine that they are speaking only to those “insiders” who view passion, shouting and rapid intake of breath as a sign of the anointing of the spirit. Their style of discourse suggests that at times they have forgotten their own self-stated desire to reach those outsiders listening in radio-land. In more technical terms they ignore the heterogeneous character of their “invisible” audience,¹²⁶ many of whom would inevitably find their manner of speaking entirely alien. At moments these radio preachers have failed to follow Goffman’s perceptive understanding that radio “announcers must conjure up in their mind’s eye the notion of listeners, and act as if these phantoms were physically present to be addressed through gaze, body orientation, voice calibrated for distance,” as “broadcasting involves self-constructed talk projected under the demands, gaze, and responsiveness of listeners who aren’t there.”¹²⁷ The self-constructed talk of these radio preachers, including their limited pictorial language, is notionally directed towards reaching out to and connecting with all their listeners; but the underlying suggestion of this section is that in reality certain oral idiosyncrasies may act as a barrier to such a process.

In this case study, which has focused on “The Country Boys”, it has been argued that Curtis Stoops, Toby Powers and a range of Radio Preachers for whom apocalyptic themes are prevalent, have made limited use of pictorial language. Their discourse has drawn upon a range of sources: personal experiences, biblical imagery and perhaps some borrowed “units of tradition”.¹²⁸ It has also been suggested that each of the preachers considered employs a number of stylistic devices which would be accepted as normal within their own discursive communities, but would often be a

¹²⁶ Erving Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981, p.241.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, p.241.

¹²⁸ Consider Martin Luther King’s method of drawing on or borrowing from other preachers: Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King - Martin Luther King, Jr. and The Word That Moved America*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, especially chapter 4, “What He Received: Units of Tradition.” pp.93-118. Given the similar styles and parallel images it seems fair to assume that radio preachers, like King, also borrow stories and pictures from other preachers.

barrier to audiences outside these groups, for example, their transformation the moment they enter the studio from speaking in normal conversational tones, into a proclamatory mode of discourse. This sense of proclamation is heightened by particular verbal idiosyncracies, such as noisily breathing or exclaiming “hah” between phrases. It represents a strongly contrasting example from the conversational broadcasts of Ronald Selby Wright or Rabbi Lionel Blue. On the basis of the evidence cited in this section, I would suggest that the “country boys” content and style of preaching on radio is primarily insider-friendly, but, in spite of their stated aims, is unlikely to attract sustained, regular listening from those outside their particular discursive communities.¹²⁹

3. Case Study Two: The City Prophets

Many of the radio preachers to be found based in the cities reflect a similar passion for cultural criticism on the radio as the “country boys” considered in Case Study One. They also betray an apparent unawareness of the potentially diverse nature of their audience, as well as a tension between loyalty to biblical imagery and a desire to connect with their listeners. The city radio preachers’ approach, however, often reflects a different experience of faith and contrasting style of radio preaching to the rural speakers of the previous section. Two city based preachers will be focused on in this shorter section. Both are skilled and experienced communicators. Both have a college education and draw from the black preaching tradition. Both make limited use of pictorial language, and tend to adapt images from the biblical texts. They both sometimes simply have their services recorded to be broadcast at a later date.

i. The Radio Faith Healer

Dr. Gregg Thomas, is minister at the “Christian Faith Temple Family Worship Centre”, based in a shopping mall on the outskirts of New Orleans. He has two doctorates and is a certified clinical Christian Counsellor. He also has experience in

¹²⁹ For research to support this assertion see section 1 and 2 of this chapter.

business, where he “did a lot of speaking motivating people.”¹³⁰ In his own eyes, this wide ranging experience has shaped his radio preaching:

You’re going through your greatest battle right now, and its hot, and your land has been scorched, and you wanna dive in the pool, but you need to stop, and you need to allow God to pour himself into you, so he can walk with you, he can let you know which way to go.¹³¹

In this extract the picture of a hot, scorched land is contrasted with the image of a pool. He does not, however, develop either image. It is bracketed by reference to being in a battle and God pouring “himself into you”. This graphic extract is a good example of how Gregg Thomas is, to borrow a term from the homiletician Henry Mitchell, “linguistically flexible”,¹³² in so far as he attempts to involve his audience as he moves rapidly from image to image.

This linguistic flexibility can also be seen, for example, in the way in which Thomas tackles the whole area of healing. He recognises that “people are hurting” and “those that are hurting just go round hurting others”. He also believes that God is the “counsellor” who can heal and “resolve” people’s pain.¹³³ He expresses this faith in vivid terms:

Some of you may have loved ones, this morning, that may have AIDS, that may have cancer, that may have incurable, with the doctors, that praise God, according to them are incurable diseases, **but I want you to know whether they’re lost or whether they’ve been found, God still loves them, Oh! Glory to God,** and because He loves them, he will **what?** He will heal them. I am here to tell **you may have a child,** praise God, that’s **paralysed,** I want you to know today that **God hears,** God will heal them. **If** you still believe. **You’ve got to believe that God is going to do it!**
There’s no sickness, no sickness,
no disease, that God can’t heal. Tell your neighbour that:
There’s no sickness, [Response: There’s no sickness],

¹³⁰ Gregg Thomas, Private Recorded Interview with J. Mitchell in New Orleans, 9 April, 1994.

¹³¹ From broadcast on 8 April 1995 on WSHO -AM 800 in New Orleans.

¹³² Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching - The Recovery of a Powerful Art*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1980, p.87.

¹³³ Gregg Thomas, Private Recorded Interview with J. Mitchell, in New Orleans, 9 April, 1994.

there's no disease, [Response: there's no disease],
that God can't heal. [Response: that God can't heal],
Oh, Alleluia! HE'LL DO IT, HE'LL DO IT,
But you've got to believe it.¹³⁴

Whilst this broadcast does not draw heavily upon pictorial language, the style of the sermon implicitly encourages its listeners to visualise their sick loved ones. It is a powerful, and potentially dangerous, device. The emphasis upon the healing of loved ones being dependent on the faith of his listeners has the potential to load helpless relatives with further feelings of guilt if there is no recovery. In other words, having seen on the screen of the imagination a healed love one, it would be easy to feel personally responsible for that restoration not taking place.

The loudness of the verbal echoes from his immediate audience illustrates the power of this style of responsive preaching within a discursive community used to such an approach. For those not familiar with this style of discourse, such sounds might easily become a barrier or noise which prevents meaningful communication. On many other occasions Dr. Gregg Thomas uses such language as a tool for psychological healing. He aims to heal the "whole man" and to help liberate his listeners from past hurts.¹³⁵ The miraculous is therefore not explicitly routinised or domesticated by Thomas, but it is made accessible through a style of discourse which can be both pictorial, employing evocative compressed images such as "dive in the pool", and coercive statements such as: "you've got to believe it!"

In another radio sermon he attempts to encourage his listeners to be "transparent", to admit they are hurting and accept the "healing balm of Gilead..... that's just God's anointing being poured on the wounds".¹³⁶ The rich tone of his voice and his "homiletical musicality"¹³⁷ adds to the imaginative picture of healing oil, the balm of

¹³⁴ Gregg Thomas, "Jesus will use you to bring forth miracles", 20 February 1994, sermon used for broadcast on WSHO, on tape from the Christian Faith Temple Family Worship Centre, New Orleans.

¹³⁵ Gregg Thomas, Private Recorded Interview with J. Mitchell in New Orleans, 9 April, 1994.

¹³⁶ Garrison Keillor, [Radio Programme] *Garrison Keillor's Radio Preachers*, BBC Radio 4, 10 August 1994, Jolyon Mitchell, producer.

¹³⁷ Evans E. Crawford, with Thomas H. Troeger, *The Hum - Call and Response in African American Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995. See Chapter 1 on "Homiletical Musicality" where

Gilead,¹³⁸ being poured onto hurts. This is not explicit representational pictorial language; nevertheless, Dr. Gregg Thomas' broadcasts represent an important strand in radio preaching: the musical and impressionistic word artist.

His style also represents an important strand within the Black homiletical tradition. As pointed out earlier, the broadcasts considered here are simply an edited version of his Sunday morning service. The radio listeners are therefore outsiders, overhearing a dialogue between preacher and a primarily black congregation. It might be argued that given this original setting, Thomas employs throughout these broadcasts, what the black homileician Henry Mitchell controversially describes as, "Black language".¹³⁹ Thomas' style certainly has a number of characteristics of this discursive tradition.

In summary, these extracts, supported by extensive listening to other material by Thomas, do provide valuable evidence to suggest that pictorial language has a role, but does not provide a foundational resource for Thomas as a broadcaster. A number of other pertinent observations can be made: First, Thomas' radio preaching "is far more than the ignorant jumble of unaspirated mumbling",¹⁴⁰ and secondly, he often employs the discourse or "lingua Franca of the Black ghetto, full of subtle shadings of sound and significance, cadences and color."¹⁴¹ Notice for example the interspersing of his sentences with such phrases as "praise God". To an outsider to his discursive community it would be perfectly possible to completely misread these oral punctuation marks as theological affirmations of sickness.

Crawford outlines his "musical understanding of how sermons are *heard* and the oral responses they awaken in listeners." p.17. See, also, Jon Spenser, *Sacred Symphony: the Chanted Sermon of the Black Preacher*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1987, and *Protest and Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990, for a more developed use of the term "homiletical musicality" in relation to the West African roots of this aspect of the black preaching tradition.

¹³⁸ Jeremiah 8:22: "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician? Jeremiah 46:11: "Go up to Gilead, and take balm".

¹³⁹ Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching - The Recovery of a Powerful Art*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1980, p.82.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.82.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.82.

Thirdly, on the basis of listening to the “hum”¹⁴² or response from his immediate audience it appears that he does “beguile [some of] his listeners because it [his discourse] is familiar.” Fourthly, Thomas does also appear to establish a “rapport and influence with them [immediate listeners], without their being conscious of the fact that the preacher has deliberately chosen this language as the most appropriate to the task of meaningful communication.”¹⁴³ Rather than attempting to create precise oral pictorial representations, Thomas tends to use language which can create a mood or atmosphere. As with the “country boys”, I am arguing that many elements of his preaching are “insider friendly”, and because of this they also have the potential to exclude listeners who are from outside the speaker’s discursive community.

ii. *The Radio Prophet*

Pastor Craig E. Soaries of Atlanta, Georgia, represents a more outspoken and uncompromising strand among the city radio preachers. He is pastor of a small local independent church called “The Victory House” which attracts 50 to 60 people on a weekly basis. Pastor Soaries sees himself as a “prophet” who is prepared to be the “laughing stock of America” in order to allow the “voice of God” to come “through his mouth”¹⁴⁴:

I am a prophet. I don’t go around calling myself..... Prophet Soaries, but I have come to accept the fact that I am a voice. God’s called me to be a voice crying in the wilderness of moral degradation in America. I’ve accepted it, and I never dreamed I’d be one, and here I am.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Evans E. Crawford, with Thomas H. Troeger, *The Hum - Call and Response in African American Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995.

¹⁴³ Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching - The Recovery of a Powerful Art*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1980, p.87.

¹⁴⁴ Pastor Craig E. Soaries, Private Recorded Interview with Jolyon Mitchell at radio station WAEC Atlanta, Georgia, 6 April, 1994, (Hereafter: Pastor Craig E. Soaries Interview, April, 1994.)

¹⁴⁵ Pastor Craig E. Soaries Interview, April, 1994.

This “voice” leaves his “invisible audience”, whom he claims to love, in little doubt about his diagnosis of the current American condition. “America is in crisis”.¹⁴⁶ In his eyes he has been “called”, and therefore has no choice but to put the spotlight on the nature of America’s “moral degradation”.

In his radio preaching he characterises the “moral degradation” in aggressively graphic terms. For Pastor Soaries, sexual deviation will lead to souls being “damned to everlasting burning hell”,¹⁴⁷ and to the fall of America.¹⁴⁸ Corruption and greed in high places are also “killing America”.¹⁴⁹ At times, his prophetic message of doom echoes the less sophisticated language of some of the “country boys”.¹⁵⁰ His use of pictorial language is reinforced both by metonymy¹⁵¹ and by provocative, at times almost offensive, challenges to his listeners. “Dare to be politically incorrect!”¹⁵² would be an appropriate epitaph for this “prophet”. Behind his uncompromising message, is a confidence, bordering on arrogance, in his own abilities as a preacher. He claims that “preaching is my life. I was born to preach.” He also states that he ignores many of the “homiletical and hermeneutical rules”, even though he knows “all the formal styles of preaching”.¹⁵³ His fifteen years of radio experience appear to have left him over confident in his ability to communicate. His shouting at the microphone, for example, often precipitates “popping”.¹⁵⁴ In other words, his highly

¹⁴⁶ Pastor Craig E. Soaries Interview, April, 1994.

¹⁴⁷ Pastor Craig E. Soaries, “Political Incorrectness”, a radio message for Love WAEC AM 86, Atlanta, Georgia, 3 April 1994.

¹⁴⁸ Pastor Soaries, like Dr. J. Vernon McGee, believes that America is going exactly the same way ancient Rome has gone. (See Craig E. Soaries Interview, April, 1994.)

¹⁴⁹ Pastor Craig E. Soaries Interview, April, 1994.

¹⁵⁰ See, especially, section 3 of this chapter.

¹⁵¹ “I see freedom of worship and freedom of expression under severe attack from Washington.” Craig E. Soaries Interview, April, 1994. For more on Metonymy see: George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, Ch. 8, “Metonymy”, pp.35-40.

¹⁵² Craig E. Soaries, “Political Incorrectness”, a radio message for Love WAEC AM 86, Atlanta, Georgia, 3 April 1994. He goes on to assert that you should be “politically incorrect so you can be right with God.” Political incorrectness in this instance means taking a stand against Lesbian and Bi-Sexual Movements. For him there is nothing complex in these issues: “it is wrong, it is wrong.”

¹⁵³ Pastor Craig E. Soaries Interview, April, 1994.

¹⁵⁴ This is a technical / descriptive term applied to “mic-blasting”, which is normally caused by “vocal breathiness” close to the microphone. Robert McLeish, *The Technique of Radio Production*, Second Edition, London: Focal Press, 1988, p.240.

aggressive style creates a barrier around him as a broadcaster which makes him difficult to listen to, and sometimes hard to hear clearly.

He is at his most pictorial when drawing upon biblical imagery. His style reflects his desire to “deal with real life issues today”. For example, he asserts: “I’m not just here to tell you about Peter, James, or John, or Daniel in the Lion’s den, but I want to talk to you about your den, that you’re in.”¹⁵⁵ This is a characteristic hermeneutical leap for Pastor Soaries to make. At times it appears that he not only uses modern images to caricature modernity, but also manipulates biblical imagery to support his own position.¹⁵⁶ This can be seen clearly when he identifies himself with the prophetic tradition when arguing against lesbianism in the local university. He claims: “I’m standing with Daniel. I’m standing with John the Baptist who had his head cut off.”¹⁵⁷ Soaries’ stance might be viewed as an example of what Martin Riesbrodt perceives as “radical patriarchalism”¹⁵⁸ or “patriarchal moralism”.¹⁵⁹ For Riesbrodt, at the centre of “the fundamentalist critique of society is the moral decay which is regarded as the result of the turn away from the divine law.”¹⁶⁰

Behind Soaries’ images lies a real anger at the signs of “moral decay”, which in his eyes is a “result of the turn away from the divine law”. His rage, with the way in which the current American political leadership has allowed the “country to go down the drain”, colours much of his radio preaching. His passion is channelled into both a desire to “touch” his listeners, and a strong visual sense for his audience:

¹⁵⁵ Pastor Craig E. Soaries Interview, April, 1994.

¹⁵⁶ Robert Wuthnow and Matthew P. Lawson, “Sources of Christian Fundamentalism in the United States” in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms - The Dynamic Character of Movements*, Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, editors, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994, p.42. “It [fundamentalism] does not simply respond to modernity; it caricatures modernity”.

¹⁵⁷ Pastor Soaries clearly identifies himself with John the Baptist who told a “politician of that day that he could not have his brother’s wife.” Pastor Craig E. Soaries Interview, April, 1994.

¹⁵⁸ Martin Riesebrodt, *The Emergence of Modern Fundamentalism in the United States and Iran*, Trans. from the German by Don Reneau. Berkley: University of California Press, 1993 (1990), p.196.

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p.178.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, pp.178-179.

I want to come straight out of the radio into their living room, into the car, and I see myself sitting right in the room with them, talking with them..... the people are so real to me, its like I can even see some of them.¹⁶¹

Pastor Soaries dreams of expanding his empire via satellite "across the world". It remains to be seen how this "prophet's" vision will be fulfilled.

Soaries provides a useful example of a broadcaster with a strong visual imagination for his listeners, but who rarely appears to transfer that skill into creating representational pictorial language which might connect with a listener from outside his own discursive community. In a similar way to Gregg Thomas he draws upon a considerable amount of biblical imagery. It is interesting to note that Soaries attempts to integrate autobiographical imagery with biblical imagery. The result is a fusion of primary personal pictorial language with secondary biblical pictorial language. Thus he becomes himself the prophet who stands with John the Baptist who "had his head chopped off".¹⁶² In contrast to Gregg Thomas, however, he often uses such "integrated" pictorial language as a way of asserting his own identity as a prophet and the outspoken leader of a small local church. Combine his microphone-popping style with the frequent articulation of his extreme conservative views, and it is probable that the approach and content of his broadcasts distance him from listeners who are not part of his discursive and faith community.

Conclusion: Lessons from Radio Preaching as Cultural Criticism

This chapter has considered the broadcast talk of both rural and urban American radio preachers. This has proved a rich seam of both positive and negative insights for preachers. It has been argued, first, that the pictorial language that certain radio preachers, such as Curtis Stoops, employ is so drenched in biblical terms that it may be familiar to listeners immersed in scriptural language, but it will sound alien or

¹⁶¹ Pastor Craig E. Soaries Interview, April, 1994.

¹⁶² Needless to say he has not fully identified with this particular image.

distant to listeners not “versed in the word”. Secondly, such biblical pictorial language is often combined with autobiographical discourse. This is sometimes expressed in exclusivist or “highly coded” terms. I would contend that as a teaching and evangelistic device it will probably fail to draw or hold an audience. Most of the radio preachers discussed have tiny listening figures, which raises questions about the capacity of their radio preaching style to hold an audience. It has been suggested, thirdly, that certain extreme para-linguistic factors, such as the “suck and blow” style of the “apocalyptic preachers” or the “verbal athleticism” of Toby Powers, can distract attention from the message itself. A more audience-centred discourse, which takes greater account of the listener, has a better chance of connecting speaker and listener. These three insights illustrate the importance of considering how a diverse radio audience is likely to decode a verbal or non-verbal message. Failing to recognise this part of the communication equation can have the effect of erecting barriers between radio preachers and those outside their small discursive communities.

This argument contains a number of important insights for preachers seeking to learn from American religious radio broadcasters. First, they cannot assume that pictorial language will necessarily act as a bridge between themselves and their listeners. Secondly, as suggested in the conclusion to the last chapter, pictorial language can perform a range of functions, some of which can simply reinforce the potentially exclusive nature of preaching. Thirdly, verbal idiosyncracies, such as “wind sucking” or “hahing” at the end of a phrase, may be a sign of divine agency within a particular faith community, but it will probably be at best intriguing and at worst distracting or even antagonising for those outside it. This style of speaking stands in sharp contrast with the more intimate conversational style of discourse employed by many of the broadcasters considered in previous two chapters. I would suggest that the responsibility lies with the preacher for taking the initiative and attempting to step into the listener’s world, and thereby anticipating the most appropriate form of discourse for effective communication.

As a balance to these critical points it is important to acknowledge the positive insights to be drawn from this small group of American radio preachers. For example, the attempt to connect biblical imagery with the contemporary experience of sickness by Gregg Thomas. Add to this the musicality of his speech and the result of such broadcast talk is “religious programming that pounds and pulsates, frequently lacking clarity and logic, but never lacking zeal and animation.” Howard Dorgan is also correct when he asserts that “it is the type of broadcasting that the fastidious would avoid with the quick turn of a dial, the push of a button. Nevertheless, it has its following and its place in American folk culture”.¹⁶³

Apart from the obvious, and at times infectious energy and enthusiasm of many of the radio preachers in America, this chapter has attempted to demonstrate that this “extraordinary American oral tradition” is by no means a “dying art”¹⁶⁴ nor even an irrelevant and discordant sound in America’s media Babel. It is probable that the survival and prospering of radio preachers in America are not only connected with their passionate discourse, but also with the free-market of electronic religion.¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, it is a useful reminder for restrained Western preachers that properly harnessed energy, passion and liveliness in the pulpit can attract listeners’ attention.

In other words, preachers can gain, not only cautionary lessons, but also some positive insights from the religious radio talk to be found on the radio in diverse areas such as the Appalachian Mountains, the Atlanta suburbs, and the New Orleans vicinity. For example, part of the appeal and fascination of radio preaching remains its directness, cultural specificity and its adherence to particular, and at times extraordinary, discursive traditions. Given the continued support of radio preaching by various small local church communities, it is clear that this form of discourse is meeting the expectations of some of the listeners. Preachers should also not fail to

¹⁶³ Howard Dorgan, *The Airwaves of Zion*, 1993, p.71.

¹⁶⁴ Dr. Gregg Thomas claims “Radio Preaching will never die!” He is an advocate for more creative approaches to radio preaching, such as integrating it within a talk show format. (April 94 Interview)

¹⁶⁵ See: R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God - American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture*, New York and Oxford: OUP, 1994. Moore argues that religion has been “deeply involved in our commercial culture since the beginning of the nineteenth century.” pp.3-11.

consider what their listeners expect, in terms of duration, style and even content. Even as preachers evaluate the reasons for so many radio preachers failing to break free from their discursive ghettos, they should not entirely ignore the radio preachers' passion and enthusiasm. There is much to learn from the oral emotion and freedom of these speakers. The oral passion and energy of a preacher such as Gregg Thomas would be far more likely to meet the expectations of a multi-racial pentecostal church in either the American or British Inner City, than the restrained Radio 4 tones of Tilby or the Oxbridge sounding war-time broadcasting lectures of C.S. Lewis.

It has also been shown that certain radio preachers have a tendency to draw upon a range of verbal pictures to support their message. For example, the pictorial language employed by preachers such as Craig Soaries and the apocalyptic radio preachers illustrates how many of these broadcasters were involved in a form of "cultural criticism".¹⁶⁶ Drawing upon contemporary, historical, personal and biblical images, they select much from "the secular world to vilify", they declare that "world polluted and uninhabitable", and they identify "a life that is more worthy of pursuing".¹⁶⁷ Preachers may radically disagree with the theology and social attitudes made explicit by broadcasters such as Stoops or Soaries, but the fact that at times they at least attempt to move beyond purely biblical imagery is instructive.

Some of the radio preachers considered in this chapter act, to borrow an image used by Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "like a sealed train travelling through foreign territory".¹⁶⁸ Their studios may not literally be locked, but they consider themselves to be "travelling through foreign territory", broadcasting in an alien land,¹⁶⁹ and seeking to undermine what they see as the evil influences which continue to corrupt much of America. One

¹⁶⁶ Robert Wuthnow and Matthew P. Lawson, "Sources of Christian Fundamentalism in the United States" in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms - The Dynamic Character of Movements*, Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, editors, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994, p.41.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p.41.

¹⁶⁸ "Like a sealed train travelling through foreign territory the Church goes on its way through the world." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, London: SCM, 1959 (1937), p.251.

¹⁶⁹ For a contrasting approach to this theme see: Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990.

of Bonhoeffer's best-known works, *Letters and Papers from Prison*,¹⁷⁰ focuses on growing secularisation and the importance of speaking about God in secular terms. His approach sketched in *Letters and Papers* stands in sharp contrast to many of the radio preachers analysed in this chapter. This difference further highlights how many radio preachers rely on biblical images and are unwilling to employ secular discourse to speak of God. Thus they can appear distant in their talk about the divine, but this is balanced by a familiarity with biblical imagery.¹⁷¹

One explanation for their use of biblical and biblical-autobiographical pictorial language is that through such speech they can distance themselves from America's corruption. The exclusivist nature of much of their discourse allows them to maintain their distinctive identity in the face of America being "taken over by homosexuals and secular humanists".¹⁷² As members of what Steve Bruce describes as "sectarian sub-cultures",¹⁷³ the exclusivist styles of speech that many radio preachers employ allows them to assert their independence from an America they perceive to be in a state of moral decline.

Preachers can also use biblical pictorial language to define their identities over and against the prevailing culture. This can be an important statement which also helps to assert the distinctive Christian character of both the speaker and a particular faith community. Alternatively, and more negatively, such articulation may become an implicit proclamation of superiority over and above the people the preacher lives

¹⁷⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Enlarged Edition, London: SCM, 1971, English translation by Eberhard Bethge from *Widerstand und Ergebung* (1951).

¹⁷¹ For an intriguing parallel with the discourse of TV evangelists see: John Thompson, "Voice Genres: The Case of Televangelical Language", in Stanley E. Porter (editor), *The Nature of Religious Language*, Roehampton Institute London Papers, 1, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996, pp.88-99. Thompson's useful chapter highlights the inherent tension within certain TV evangelists' discourse, between on the one hand familiarity with the divine and on the other distance from the divine. (p.99) As argued above such *familiarity* and *distance* can also be identified in the work of radio preachers such as Curtis Stoops and the Apocalyptic preachers.

¹⁷² Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p.142.

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, pp.141-2. Bruce memorably invites his readers to "imagine a fundamentalist Baptist family in a small city in Virginia who live in a cocooned world, where "they know a lot about the world outside but that knowledge is passed through a very strong ideological prism. They know what is wrong with the rest of America: it has been taken over by homosexuals and secular humanists."

amongst. Or it may simply reinforce the use of insider-discourse amongst the preachers' listeners. If this negative alternative becomes the case then biblical pictorial language may become a barrier to real communication.

It is too simple, however, to interpret the biblical or the autobiographical pictorial language of the radio preachers as a "sealed" phenomenon which is, in Wuthnow and Lawson's terms, "anti-modern", or as a "counter-discourse to the discourse of modernity".¹⁷⁴ To argue that radio preachers are "simply anti-modern misses the extensive degree to which they are also modern."¹⁷⁵ Many of the radio preachers considered may have criticised aspects of what is often described as late-modernity,¹⁷⁶ but they happily employ many of the broadcasting tools of modernity.¹⁷⁷ This analysis extends the argument further in terms of how preachers should relate to their own specific cultural and communicative context. Should they attempt to draw listeners back to a former "golden age" into a sectarian sub-culture or should they point them forwards towards a new territory?

A large proportion of radio preachers appear to take the former option. Many would echo one of the most widely syndicated radio preaching voices, the late Dr. J. Vernon McGee,¹⁷⁸ when he vividly reminisces, without a breath, about the golden days of faith:

America needs to return to the day when Grandpa took the team out of the field in the early afternoon on Wednesday in order to hitch them to the old spring wagon into which Grandma put all the children after she washed their faces shining clean and they drove off

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p.41.

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p.41.

¹⁷⁶ John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity - A Social Theory of the Media*, Oxford: Polity, 1995, pp.8-9. Thompson alludes to his "dissatisfaction" with much of the talk about post-modernity and post-modernism. He is not persuaded we have entered into a new age.

¹⁷⁷ Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, "Fundamentalism and the Media, 1930-90" in D.A. Stout and J. M. Buddenbaum, *Religion and Mass Media, Audiences and Adaptations*, London: Sage, 1996, pp.74 ff.

¹⁷⁸ In 1988 Dr. J. Vernon McGee's *Thru' the Bible* was syndicated to over 496 National Religious Broadcasting stations. This made it the second most widely syndicated daily religious programme. See AEMM, p.175, original source was "Top NRB Daily Religious Programs", *Religious Broadcasting*, April 1988, pp. 8, 14. Interestingly, only James Dobson's more magazine style programme *Focus on the Family*, was to be found on more stations (744).

to the prayer meeting at the little white church at the cross-roads
underneath the oak trees where everyone believed the bible.¹⁷⁹

Many of the radio preachers considered here yearn nostalgically to return to those halcyon days. The prayer meeting at the “little white church” under the oak trees epitomises this idealised and almost certainly misleading view of past faith.

Ironically, this time was also free of radio masts or TV aerials overshadowing the church. Radio preachers are themselves at a “cross-roads” in America. Many are choosing the route which leads them safely back to their own communities of discourse. From there, they continue to look back longingly to an imaginary past where everyone “believed the bible”. In this protected discursive community they talk only to those who speak the same language, occasionally they shout in idiosyncratic style over the battlements where few outsiders listen to their cultural criticisms. Many radio preachers continue to make emphatic statements in the highly coded “language of Zion” and fail to translate their message into terms which would be accessible for outsiders.

I would argue that it would be disastrous for preachers to follow in the footsteps of radio preachers who have remained in, retreated into or are retreating into the safety of their own discursive communities. Proclamatory discourse from the pulpit which excludes, whether in style and content, will not lead listeners back to a “golden age”, it is more likely to turn them away. In this chapter it has been suggested that one of the primary reasons for rejecting this backward-movement is that such exclusivist forms of speaking will create barriers, rather than bridges, between the speaker and the listener. In contrast, the following chapter will turn to explore the practical and theological arguments which instead support a move towards translation and embodied engagement with the listener.

¹⁷⁹ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible*, Isaiah 1: 4-18, broadcast on 24 March 1994, on WBGW. He is quoting from an editorial from the *Wall Street Journal* at the time of the depression.

Chapter 7. **Towards a Practical Theology of Pictorial and Multi-Sensorial Orality**

In the first part of this dissertation (Chapters 1, 2 and 3), it was argued that preachers hoping to be heard in an audio-visual culture have much to learn from radio broadcasters. This case was made by investigating three fields: homiletics, radio and areas of our audio-visual culture. In the second part (Chapters 4, 5 and 6), a number of specific homiletical lessons were highlighted from the practice of various religious radio broadcasters. Both positive and negative insights were drawn from speakers operating in a range of cultural and communicative contexts.

This third part of the dissertation (Chapter Seven), will put forward the practical theological grounds for arguing that in order to be heard in an audio-visual culture, preachers need to translate their discourse into pictorial and multi-sensorial orality. The focus of the argument will thus move into the field of explicit practical theology.¹ This represents a move towards theological reflection on some of the different forms of broadcast practice discussed earlier. To facilitate this move I will introduce new material, as well as drawing upon issues raised in the first two parts of the dissertation.

1. Introduction

In this chapter it will be suggested that preachers who are learning lessons about effective oral communication from religious radio broadcasters, need to develop a practical theology not only of “pictorial language”, but also of “multi-sensorial”

¹ Since this dissertation seeks to identify “lessons for homiletics”, the entire thesis has taken place within the wider field of practical theology, of which homiletics should be seen as a part. I have therefore worked as a “practical theologian”, who, in the words of James Whyte, has attempted to ask “critical questions about the way faith expresses itself in practice, and about the relationship between the faith and the language.” James Whyte in Alistair V. Campbell, editor, *A Dictionary of Pastoral Care*, London: SPCK, 1987, p.213. The approach employed in this thesis also partially echoes Whyte’s argument that: “Since the Church’s life and action is related not only to its self-understanding and comprehension of its faith, but also to the changing society in which it functions, practical theology is triadic, concerned with the inter-relationship of faith, practice and social reality and aware the lines of force flow in both directions”.

language.² This contention will be based upon a range of sources, specifically including: the work of one further “radio preacher”, a provocative homiletical text by William Willimon, examples from some of the previous chapters, and an analysis of relevant works by Walter Ong and Jacques Ellul. Critically engaging with this material I will put forward the practical theological case for a renewed approach to orality. On the basis of this engagement, the foundations for a practical theology of pictorial and multi-sensorial secondary orality will be laid. This term, “multi-sensorial secondary orality”, will be discussed in detail in the fourth section of this chapter. It refers to a form of broadcast discourse (described by Walter Ong as “secondary orality”) which uses word pictures to evoke an imaginative sense of hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting and/or touching (hence multi-sensorial).

At the heart of my case is the contention that in an audio-visual culture, preachers need to learn to *translate* their speech into forms which will be more effective at engaging their listeners’ imaginations. Pictorial and multi-sensorial language are two such forms and are closely related. This translation process moves beyond word-for-word “formal correspondence” to what the translation practitioner and theorist Eugene Nida describes as “dynamic equivalence”.³ This form of translation can recreate the impact of the primary text,⁴ but taken to extremes it may dilute or distort the original message. Willimon is a scholar-preacher who is vehemently opposed to a translation model for preaching which dilutes the distinctive message of the text. His

² For a recent and insightful text exploring the diverse field of “practical theology”, see: Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action - Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society*, London: SPCK, 1996. Chapter 1, “Practical Theology as an Academic Discipline”, provides a number of useful definitions of this diverse field. They argue that “practical theology stands at the frontier between faith understanding the world and faith in action”. p.23.

³ See: Eric North, “Eugene A. Nida: An Appreciation”, in Matthew Black and William A. Smalley, *On Language, Culture, and Religion: in Honor of Eugene A. Nida*. The Hague, Paris: Montou, 1974, “As Nida developed and popularised it, dynamic equivalence translation captures the meaning and spirit of the original without being bound to its linguistic structure (formal correspondence).” p.xii.

⁴ I have appropriated Nida’s term “dynamic equivalence” for my own argument as a way of clarifying the model of translation I am employing. I would echo Nida’s definition of “dynamic equivalence” as a: “translation in which the message of the original text has been so transported into the receptor language that the response of the receptor is essentially like that of the original receptors.” E.Nida and Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Leiden: Brill, 1969, p.202. The result of dynamic equivalence translation is far more than “mere correct communication of information” as people will “feel as well as understand what is said.” p.25. See also E.A. Nida’s earlier book, *Toward a Science of Translating*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1964.

argument will be evaluated as a way of assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the case for translation into pictorial and multi-sensorial language.

Behind this discussion lies the issue of how far preachers should adapt their discourse because of the changes in orality brought about by the rapid evolution in communication technologies. Relevant sections of Walter Ong's work will be analysed to demonstrate the significance of this question. In order to emphasise the importance of preachers developing pictorial and multi-sensorial forms of speech, Ong's hypothesis that orality has undergone a series of transformations will be discussed in relation to some of the radio discourse considered earlier in this dissertation.

The practical theological case being made, therefore, is for a renewed form of homiletical discourse. A critique of the work of Jacques Ellul will be used to support this argument. If, as Ellul suggests, we are facing a "communication problem", assaulted from all sides by artificial images, we need to develop a renewed use of language. It will be argued that in order to develop this renewed language it is necessary to develop a balanced theological perspective which acknowledges the "multi-sensorial" nature of God's communication. Such a practical theology of "multi-sensorial secondary orality" also has the potential to bridge a fundamental divide described in detail by Ellul: the division between those who argue for the primacy of the word in theological communication and those who assert its bankruptcy and the cultural supremacy of the image.

On the basis of this practical theology the chapter will conclude by arguing for the use of "multi-sensorial secondary orality" by preachers intent on communicating effectively today. This extension of the original idea of learning from broadcast pictorial language, will be based upon the evidence of the preceding chapters, as well as on the theoretical and theological discussions of this chapter. In order to root the theoretical discussion in practical experience, this chapter will first turn to a broadcaster who has spoken to both American and British audiences.

2. *Translation in Practice: The Radio Bishop*⁵

The religious radio broadcaster to be considered in this section stands some distance from either the rural voices of the “country boys” or the war-time talks of the “radio academic” analysed in earlier chapters. His distinctiveness merits close attention, for he represents a specific example of a broadcaster who has attempted to *translate* his message into verbal forms that will engage his listeners’ visual and aural imaginations. Bishop E. Don Taylor (currently Episcopalian Area Bishop of New York) is a rare example of a “mainstream” religious radio broadcaster who simultaneously had both an American and a British audience. His unique radio ministry lasted for five years in the Virgin Islands (1989-94), before he was invited to become one of the four assistant bishops of New York City in April 1994. His approach to broadcasting is characterised by a sensitivity to his audience, his context and his medium.

This sensitivity was expressed by the way in which he “painted word pictures that were familiar.”⁶ His self-description of the pictures he constructed is illuminating:

The blue sea, all these islands are lapped by the Caribbean Sea. Everybody is within visual distance of the sea, so to talk about the blue of the sea and the sunlight sparkling on the waters, and the boats plying up and down the shores, and the fishermen pulling in their nets, is to talk the language that people understand, because they are *living with it every day*..... Donkeys walking down the hillsides. Women carrying baskets over their heads. The music, the thing people do when they are walking to the market. They sing among themselves. If you can break into song yourself, people will join in.⁷

One of the strengths of Bishop Taylor’s approach is his use of word pictures which resonate with his audience’s everyday experience. These are not static portraits.

⁵ Bishop Taylor is affectionately known in some circles as “the radio bishop”. After leaving high school in Kingston, Jamaica, he went at 18 years old to be a junior announcer at Radio Jamaica and Rediffusion. He “developed a flair and love for broadcasting” at this early stage. He has also studied radio and broadcasting in Canada, learning from the practices of CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation).

⁶ Example from his radio broadcasting preaching cited in a private recorded interview between Jolyon Mitchell and Bishop Taylor, 20 August, 1995, Edinburgh. The *italics* are mine. (Hereafter: Bishop Taylor Interview, Aug. 1995.)

⁷ Bishop Taylor Interview, Aug. 1995.

Notice how the shore is lapped, the boats ply, the fishermen pull in their nets, the donkeys walk and the woman carry. In other words, he constructs moving pictures. He also portrays these scenes in multi-colour: the blue sea sparkles. They not only appeal to the visual imagination, but also to the aural imagination as he introduces music to evoke sound memories. He clearly wishes both to understand and to involve his audience on a number of different levels. He sings, they join in. He paints pictures, they imagine. It is as if he is attempting to paint verbal pictures which will engage at least two of his listeners' senses and so enable them to interact more fully with what he is saying. Beneath the surface of such evocative word pictures lie a theology of broadcasting, a pastoral concern and a desire to translate his message into accessible terms for his listeners.

i. Theology of Broadcasting

I recognise that broadcasting is as much an instrument in the hands of God, as pulpit, as lectern, as altar, as chalice, as bread, as wine.⁸

This is a striking statement from an Anglo-Catholic Bishop.⁹ The emphasis upon wine, bread, chalice and altar are to be expected from a priest with a high view of the Eucharist. The inclusion of the pulpit and the lectern reflects a "bi-focal" attitude towards the preached Word and the celebrated Sacrament.¹⁰ Most surprising is his understanding of broadcasting as "as much as" various sacraments to be an "instrument in the hands of God."¹¹ Implicit in his reference to bread and wine is another significant point for the current discussion. Stated simply, Taylor hints here in a belief in the potential for God to communicate through a range of senses. Beyond

⁸ Bishop Taylor Interview, Aug. 1995.

⁹ See: Carlo Maria Martini, *Communicating Christ to the World*, translated by Thomas M. Lucas, Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1994, p.84, for support of this view. Cardinal Martini argues: "The mass media, in the variety of languages they use (words, images, sound, gesture, resonance, emotion, etc.) are potential tents in which the Word does not disdain to dwell; they are the hem of his garment through which saving power can flow."

¹⁰ D.Coggan, *The Sacrament of the Word*, London: Collins, 1989. The former Archbishop of Canterbury advocates a bi-focal understanding of the means of grace. "..... the Living God comes to us both in the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ and in the sacrament of the Word....." p.24

¹¹ Whilst Taylor does not go so far as to state that broadcasting is a channel of Grace, he is hinting towards such an understanding of God's agency or involvement in this communicative act.

hearing about and seeing the elements of bread and wine, they are also to be tasted. The multi-sensorial nature of God's communication will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

ii. Pastoral Concerns

On the basis of this belief in the potential of broadcasting to be a "tool of God", it is not surprising that Bishop Taylor argues: "If the Church is to communicate the Gospel effectively it needs to learn some of the normal modern techniques of communication".¹² This is a belief which has become more intense as he has grown older. He put his conviction into practice in the Virgin Islands, during the last five years of nearly an eight year bishopric, by producing a variety of programmes on one of the local stations.

His primary programme was a weekly Sunday morning show called *The Bishop Speaks*. Fifteen minutes of an hour long programme were made up of his sermons. The remainder consisted of a largely traditional Anglican matins service. *The Bishop Speaks* was broadcast from WAVI. This radio station was owned by a prominent Episcopalian, who allowed his bishop to use the station at no charge. The programme was partly initiated in answer to pastoral needs created by having a church of some 45,000 members spread out over 99 islands. Small fishing communities or hoteliers living on numerous tiny islands were not easily accessible. *The Bishop Speaks* was an attempt to reach even the most isolated islanders. In Bishop Taylor's eyes the broadcast had pastoral by-products: *The Bishop Speaks* unified the diocese, it enabled him to go beyond his own denomination and it even enhanced his own image as bishop.¹³

¹² Bishop Taylor Interview, Aug. 1995.

¹³ Bishop Taylor Interview, Aug. 1995. - This concern for enhancing "his own image as bishop" raises the issue of motivation. A cynical interpretation would be: This programme was a vehicle for his self-promotion. Such a view does not, however, explain the inclusive style of the programmes, and his stated emphasis on being a "channel" through his broadcasting.

The bishop himself admits it was a “one man show”. Nevertheless, he did attempt to try to “broaden the base” so it “was deeply rooted in the culture and lifestyle of the people”.¹⁴ In order to do this, Bishop Taylor brought in local music, with reggae beat, as well as recording music from many of the local churches and scripture readings from local schools. His aims were to vary the content as well as to make listeners from different islands feel that they had a stake in the programme. Birthday requests and local announcements were part of the process of encouraging audience ownership. A further method employed by Bishop Taylor was to keep his “eyes and ears open” for current local incidents which would be relevant to his audience.¹⁵ His receptiveness to appropriate images was balanced by his awareness that “language can become so picturesque and overbearing” that it “destroys the message”.¹⁶ He was conscious that in communication theory terms, the encoding of the message can become too elaborate for it to be decoded appropriately.

iii. Translating the Message

The bishop’s theology of broadcasting and his pastoral concern are manifested in an attempt to translate his message into terms which his audience can receive and understand. This process of “translation”, or “transference”, could be described as pictorially updating biblical stories or “dynamic equivalence”.¹⁷ He would tell the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand, for example, by setting it not “out in the wilderness”, but out in one of the local parks. Instead of the disciples the local sanitation department might collect the remaining litter.¹⁸ This example of translation

¹⁴ Bishop Taylor Interview, Aug. 1995.

¹⁵ Bishop Taylor Interview, Aug. 1995.

¹⁶ Bishop Taylor Interview, Aug. 1995.

¹⁷ Taylor attempts to capture the meaning and spirit of the original story, without “being bound to its linguistic structure”. See Introduction of this chapter. Whilst Taylor is obviously not engaged in translating from the Greek or Hebrew his method does have interesting parallels with Nida and Taber’s four priorities for biblical translation: “1) Contextual consistency has priority over verbal consistency (or word-for-word concordance). 2) Dynamic equivalence has priority over formal correspondence. 3) The aural heard form of language has priority over the written form. 4) Forms that are used by and acceptable to the audience for which a translation is intended have priorities over forms that may be traditionally more prestigious.” *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Leiden: Brill, 1969, p.14.

¹⁸ Radio Preaching example cited in Bishop Taylor Interview, Aug. 1995.

was rooted in his pastoral concern to make such familiar stories more accessible to his audience in the Virgin Islands.

He claims: "radio taught me" to be "deeply sensitive to the nature of the audience".¹⁹ His belief is that the more you know your audience, the more you are able to communicate with them. This makes a striking parallel with the efforts of R.S. Wright, the Radio Padre, to get to know or identify with his listeners.²⁰ Like Wright, Taylor made use of verbal pictures which were easily recognisable for his audience. This was part of the process of building a "rapport" with his listeners, on the basis that the more you enter into their experiences, the more likely they are to enter into what you are saying. This understanding of communication is based on a two-way interactive principle for what is, as argued in the second chapter of this thesis, primarily a one way medium. It is also a relevant lesson for preachers who seek to engage their listeners more effectively.

The medium of radio is in Bishop Taylor's "bloodstream". He now aims to set up a station for the metropolitan diocese of New York. It will be fascinating to observe how he adapts his language and translates the biblical stories for a "sea of people", amongst towering skyscrapers and yellow cabs. In the Virgin Islands the novelty of having a bishop broadcast a personal weekly show appears to have caught the imagination of the islanders.²¹ Whether a similar approach will be so successful in media-saturated New York remains an open question.

In this section, three strands behind Bishop Taylor's broadcast talk have been identified. First, his theology of broadcasting, secondly his pastoral concern for his parishioners and thirdly his desire to translate his message into accessible discourse, which will also engage his listeners' visual and aural imaginations. He demonstrates a

¹⁹ Bishop Taylor Interview, Aug. 1995.

²⁰ For a useful discussion about the importance of "identification" in preaching see: Alvin Rueter, *Making Good Preaching Better*, Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997, pp.24-44. Rueter concludes the discussion arguing that: "identifying with the people's ways and self-interest is one factor in changing the perception that *homily* and *dull* are synonyms." p.44.

²¹ Bishop Taylor Interview, Aug. 1995.

sensitivity for his audience, his context and the language appropriate for his medium which parallels elements of the work of broadcasters such as Lionel Blue or Selby Wright. He claims that his speaking style has been shaped by the radio medium. In a way which also echoes the inner ear's role of **translating** "sound vibrations into nerve pulses",²² Taylor attempts to translate words into pictures, in order that his listeners can interact more fully with the messages he communicates.

As a translator into pictorial discourse, Taylor stands with many of the other radio broadcasters, such as Lewis or Tilby, considered in the second part of this thesis. Preachers can learn from his enthusiasm for interacting with his listeners, and from his translation of biblical stories into forms of speech more likely to engage his audience. This moves beyond simple pictorial language, to forms of broadcast talk which will engage other senses. Another reason for focusing on Taylor at this stage in the argument is that his practice raises the question of how far it is appropriate for preachers to *translate* their message into multi-sensorial language.

3. *A Question of Translation*

The "dynamic equivalence" model of translating the message into forms more accessible for listeners is an important strand in this thesis. For some homileticsians, however, this approach is merely "linguistic accommodation" which undermines the distinctive nature of Christian discourse. This section will consider such a view, through a critical reading of a recent text by William Willimon, the prolific author and professor of Christian ministry at Duke Divinity School, Durham, North Carolina.

i. *"Distinctive Discourse"*

In his provocative and aptly titled book *Peculiar Speech*, Willimon is adamant that: "we preachers need not be embarrassed by the distinctiveness of our speech".²³ He

²² M. Talbot-Smith, *Broadcast Sound Technology*, Second Edition, Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1995 (1990). These "small electrical pulses", are conveyed to the brain by "separate nerves". pp. 15-16.

²³ William H. Willimon, *Peculiar Speech - Preaching to the Baptized*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1992, p.8.

claims that “we preach within a distinctive universe of discourse. We talk funny.”²⁴ He claims the reason for this is that preaching is “distinctive baptismal speech”.²⁵ Willimon argues that because preaching usually takes place in a distinctive community, “amongst the baptised or the being baptised”,²⁶ it should maintain its “peculiar” nature. If preachers are true to their baptismal vows a “distinctive identity” will develop from “this distinctive community of discourse”.²⁷

On the basis of this understanding of preaching,²⁸ he admits:

Unfortunately, most of the theology I learned in seminary was in the translation mode. Take this biblical image and translate it into something more palatable..... In more liberal speech, talk tiptoes around the outrage of Christian discourse and ends up as an innocuous, though urbane, affirmation of the ruling order..... By the time most of us finish qualifying the scandal of Christian speech, very little can be said by the preacher that can't be heard elsewhere.²⁹

The assumption is that translation will dilute, undermine, or even eclipse the scandalous nature of Christian speech. Clearly uneasy with the “translation mode” of preaching, Willimon remarks:

I am troubled by preaching that is captured by the hermeneutics of translation, as if the Gospel can be transposed into some other idiom that is somehow superior to the gospel.³⁰

Willimon's understanding that the gospel cannot be “transposed” or translated into another idiom will be discussed further in the following section. At this stage it is valuable to see how his argument develops, for, if his critique of translation is correct, it challenges my contention that preachers should engage in translation.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.6.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.9.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.6.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.6.

²⁸ Willimon argues that: “Christian preaching brings out or brings into view the mystery inherent in the waters of baptism. Baptismal preaching names the reality to which we have all been exposed, that is, the peculiar salvation of this crucified God”. *ibid.*, p.5

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.9.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.16.

He extends his argument in a chapter on “Preaching to Pagans”, where he challenges those who suggest that:

In a dangerously divided world, wouldn't our time as preachers be better spent in the search for some common universal, linguistic denominator rather than in the cultivation of the distinctiveness of Christian discourse?³¹

It is clear that Willimon rejects the search for “common, universal” form of discourse³² and embraces instead the “cultivation of the distinctiveness of Christian discourse.” In disagreement with one of the conclusions of the previous chapter of this thesis, he *challenges* those who argue that: “Our task as preachers, if we want to be heard by those in the world, is to adjust our parochial, “in house” ecclesial speech to the talk of the “wider world”.”³³ He makes the point that preachers who break out from their own “in house” discursive community, have simply “moved into another” discursive group.³⁴

In answer to the question, of how the “particular truths” of “the baptismal community” are to “be proclaimed in a public world that does not share those truths,” Willimon points out that the early Christians maintained their linguistic integrity. They did this by moving out from their original cultural context without being “linguistically assimilated” into the Roman status quo. This does not mean, however, a complete rejection of new forms of speech. He cites, for example, the early Christian “communicators” who “readily used the Greek language that was available to them”:

..... they did not accept the cosmology, the world which Greek language conventionally described. The language was seized and

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 76. He also implies strong disagreement with those who argue “that the best hope for Christian preachers is to find some sort of religious *Esperanto*, a culturally approved common mode of discourse, a metalanguage that frees us from the linguistic bind imposed on us by having to work with pre-second-century Hebrew and Greek texts.....”

³² For a brief discussion of such a “common language” or “lingua franca”, see: David Ford, “Constructing a Public Theology” in Frances Young, editor, *Dare we speak of God in Public?*, London: Mowbray, 1995, p. 154. Ford relates this to “the supersession of religious language by a variety of scientific and professional languages, and the secularisation of political rhetoric”.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 77.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 79. See also: John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984, chapter 2. Willimon also uses Yoder to support his case.

used for a very different message in order to construe for the hearers a very different world.³⁵

Whilst he rejects translation which dilutes the message, he nevertheless employs an appropriation model for Christian speech: “The language was seized and used for a very different message.”

In summary, Willimon appears to be arguing against a “translation model” of preaching which softens or distorts the original message. In his eyes “the task of preaching is to teach what would not be known before it is announced, to cultivate those insights, means of describing, and vocabulary with which Christians describe the world.”³⁶ Throughout *Peculiar Speech* he is forcefully arguing for preachers to preserve the distinctive nature of Christian discourse. He is obviously not arguing against *all kinds* of translation, otherwise he would have to preach in Aramaic and Greek; but, for Willimon, translating the form and content of the message into more culturally acceptable terms is exactly how to undermine its unique character.

ii. “*The Translation Principle*”

Willimon’s thesis is vulnerable at a number of points. First, he fails to distinguish the different forms of translation which may be useful for preachers. Secondly, he incorrectly assumes that translation necessarily leads to a compromise of the distinctive challenge of authentic Christian preaching. Thirdly, he ignores the historical importance of translation for the roots and growth of the Christian church. Fourthly, he overlooks the foundational importance of translation for Christian theology.

First, translation as a single form: Willimon does not offer a clear definition of what he means by the “hermeneutics of translation”, but a negative understanding can be inferred. For Willimon, to allow contemporary thought-forms or experience to dictate

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.80.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.114. “We must learn Christianity, even as we learn a foreign language.”

your message is to corrupt it.³⁷ This could be described as “translation by dilution”. By contrast, Alasdair MacIntyre identifies two “distinct species of translation, translation by same-saying and translation by linguistic innovation”.³⁸ Willimon’s understanding of translation is too narrow,³⁹ as he fails to make clear that “linguistic innovation” does not necessarily mean corruption of the message.

This leads us to the second point, translation as a form of compromise: Willimon implies that certain translation modes of communication will lead preachers to dilute or even corrupt their message in order to make it “more palatable”. This is not necessarily always the case. As argued earlier for instance, C.S. Lewis frequently translated his orthodox message into pictorial language for his radio talks. Consider this example from his radio talk on “Eros”:

Rather like a garden, a garden is a glorious thing full of life, and giving us life; but you must not trust your garden to weed itself, or anything of that sort, it hasn’t got that kind of goodness. A garden left to nature will soon not be a garden. It’s the same with our passions. They also are life giving. But when God planted that garden of our passions he set a man over it to dress it, and set the man under himself.⁴⁰

³⁷ See, for example, Willimon’s critique of those who attempt to translate the Gospel into subjectivised garb and urge “subordination of the authoritative text to the critical hermeneutics of the experience of the oppressed.” *ibid.*, p.16.

³⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* London: Duckworth, 1988. p.372. MacIntyre also identifies a number problems about translatability. Most relevant for the current discussion and for preachers is his consideration of “situations in which the task of translation is from the language of one community whose language-in-use is expressive of and presupposes a particular system of well-defined beliefs into the different language of another such community with beliefs which in some key areas are strongly incompatible with those of the first community.” p.379. See also the discussion of translation in the Conclusion of this thesis, Section 2.iv.

³⁹ George Steiner supports this point, when he usefully outlines how the theory of translation, since the seventeenth century, invariably divides the topic into three classes: “The first comprises strict literalism, the word-by-word matching of the interlingual dictionary..... The second is the great central area of ‘translation’ by means of faithful but autonomous restatement. The translator closely reproduces the original but composes a text which is natural to his own tongue..... The third class is that of imitation, recreation, variation, interpretative parallel. It covers a large, diffuse area, extending from transpositions of the original into a more accessible idiom all the way to the freest, perhaps only allusive or parodistic echoes.” George Steiner, *After Babel - Aspects of Language and Translation* - Second Edition, Oxford: OUP, 1992, p.266.

⁴⁰ C.S. Lewis, *Four Talks on Love: Storge, Philia, Eros, Agape*, 1st Edition, Tape 3, The Parish of the Air, The Episcopal Radio-TV Foundation, Atlanta, Georgia, 1970.

This form of translation into pictorial analogy probably made Lewis's message more accessible, but not necessarily "any more palatable".

Thirdly, translation as historical fact: Willimon does not do justice in his text to what Andrew Walls has described as "the translation principle".⁴¹ I would argue, with Walls, that Christianity is in a constant state of dynamic translation, and has been since its earliest days.⁴² Think, for example, of the move from Aramaic spoken by Jesus to the *koine* Greek of the New Testament Gospels.⁴³ There never was, to our knowledge, an Aramaic text of the Gospel.⁴⁴ "Early Christianity was", according to Walls, "touched by the translation principle":

Not even Jewish Palestine could be culturally and linguistically sealed off from the Hellenistic world; and the very words of Jesus come to us in Greek dress.⁴⁵

Thus when Willimon denies that "the Gospel can be transposed into some other idiom that is somehow superior to the gospel" he underestimates the extent to which the evangelion, as expressed in the New Testament, took on a new idiom soon after its birth. Christianity's ability to translate and adapt itself to new cultural contexts is an important factor in its growth.⁴⁶

Fourthly, translation as a foundational principle of Christianity: Willimon ignores this theme and fails to do justice to the implications of an incarnational theology for

⁴¹ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History - Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996. See especially chapter 3: "The Translation Principle in Christian History".

⁴² See, also, Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1989. Sanneh asserts that: "Even if in practice Christians wish to stop the translation process, claiming their form of it as final and exclusive, they have not been able to suppress it for all time." p.47.

⁴³ Sanneh argues that "ancient Greek, without any claim to being the native or working language of Jesus and the close circle of apostles, became the preponderant medium of religious discourse. The original Aramaic and Hebraic languages, which formed the basis of Jesus' preaching, became a minor undercarriage, making a halting intrusion in the generally smooth progress of the new discourse." *ibid.*, p.31.

⁴⁴ Andrew Walker, *Telling the Story: Gospel, Mission and Culture*, London: SPCK, 1996, p.22.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.32.

⁴⁶ See: Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964.

understanding the importance of translation. I would support Walls' contrasting contention that "Christian faith rests on a divine act of translation: 'the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us' (John 1:14)"⁴⁷ Walls echoes this assertion by developing the point more explicitly later in the same chapter: "Incarnation is translation. When God in Christ became man, Divinity was translated into humanity".⁴⁸ In support of Walls' understanding of translation, it is possible to adapt two Christologically significant Pauline phrases without misrepresenting the general sense of each claim. Jesus "the sinless one was *translated* into sin in order that we might become the goodness of God";⁴⁹ or Jesus was "rich" but "*translated* himself into poverty for your sake to make you rich out of his poverty".⁵⁰ Most tellingly, for the current discussion, Walls asserts that, "the first divine act of translation into humanity thus gives rise to a constant succession of new translations."⁵¹ These foundational insights have clearly not influenced Willimon's narrow understanding of the place of translation in preaching.

It has been argued that Willimon's theoretical understanding of the "hermeneutics of translation" for preaching is too narrow, unnecessarily negative, lacking historical perspective and weak in its theological foundations. Willimon as a preacher, however, displays a tension in his own sermons between faithfully holding onto distinctive Christian discourse and translating his message into accessible terms for

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.26.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.27.

⁴⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:21 (adapted from the Jerusalem Bible). It would also be possible to use the term "translate" in the RSV translation without undermining the sense: "For our sake he *translated* (made) him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

⁵⁰ 2 Corinthians 8:9 (adapted from the Jerusalem Bible). Whilst it would be possible to make a similar adaptation from Philippians 2:5-7, to: Jesus, though "in very nature God" *translated* himself into the "very nature of a servant", it would skirt too many complex and controversial exegetical difficulties with this particular passage.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.27.

his listeners in an American university chapel.⁵² He may not acknowledge it, but Willimon himself employs a “translation mode” for parts of his sermons.⁵³

Nevertheless, Willimon’s thesis does provide a number of useful warnings for preachers seeking to employ such a translation mode of preaching. Christian speakers should reflect on whether they are becoming entirely indistinguishable from other communicators in the content of speech they employ. Consider the pressure on *Thought for the Day* contributors, described earlier by Angela Tilby, to offer moral homilies without mentioning God. Whether in Nazi Germany, Apartheid South Africa, or the Consumerist West, preachers have faced and continue to face the seductive temptation of translating their messages to fit the *Zeitgeist* or the ruling ideologies of their age. Christian preachers, however, stand in the tradition of a Galilean story-teller who frequently translated his message into accessible pictorial language and parables, not in order to affirm the status quo, but to challenge his listeners to “a radical *metanoia*, a U-turn of the mind”.⁵⁴

Lesslie Newbigin’s argument in *Foolishness to the Greeks*, also cited by Willimon,⁵⁵ is pertinent at this point. He argues that Christian communication across cultural frontiers should first be in the “language of the receptor culture”, and secondly, it should challenge listeners and even call “into question that way of understanding embodied by the language it uses”.⁵⁶ The tension for preachers speaking in an audio-visual culture, therefore, is to speak in terms that can be understood, but to do

⁵² See: William H. Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, *Preaching to Strangers: Evangelism in Today’s World*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992. This tension can be detected in all ten of Willimon’s sermons in this text, but see especially: “Living Sacrifice” p.29ff and “Be Imitators of Me” p.43 f.

⁵³ For example, in a sermon based on Philippians 3:17-21, entitled “Be Imitators of Me”, Willimon translates this issue of imitation into talking about how he handles his homiletics class. He actively discourages imitation of himself as the tutor. He even admits: “Translated into honest English, this means: I want to get through this class without taking responsibility for you.” *ibid.*, p.45.

⁵⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, London: SPCK, 1986, p.6.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, pp.87-88. Willimon cites Newbigin with approval. Whilst Willimon does not acknowledge it, this represents a further qualification to Willimon’s original argument concerning translation.

⁵⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, London: SPCK, 1986, pp.5-6. His third principle for Christian communication across cultural frontiers, is that it should rely not on human persuasiveness, but on God for its ultimate effectiveness.

so in such a way that the distinctive Christian story rooted in the first century is not compromised. Preachers have a number of alternatives: to speak boldly and directly, to converse indirectly and obliquely, or to speak in a secular idiom, eschewing explicit theological language.⁵⁷ Newbigin warns against, on the one hand, speaking in such a way that your listeners will not understand the nature of your message, and on the other hand, speaking in terms so familiar to the receptor culture that the message will simply be “absorbed into the existing world view.”⁵⁸

In the previous three chapters a range of religious radio broadcasters’ work has been discussed which illustrates this tension between accessible and distinctive discourse. Preachers can learn from the way some broadcasters, such as Wright, Winter or Tilby translated their theological insights into the language of their listeners, whilst also insisting on retaining their integrity as distinctive Christian speakers. Other extracts have been used to highlight speakers who have retained their distinctive discursive styles, but have therefore failed to translate their message into terms accessible to those outside their discursive communities.

This chapter began with an example of a Radio Bishop who emphasised the importance of translating biblical material into pictorial language which will engage his listeners. It was then argued, countering Willimon, that such acts of translation lie at the heart of Christian theology. This leads to an interim conclusion: one of the foundations for a practical theology of pictorial language is an understanding of the

⁵⁷ See: Duncan B. Forrester, *Beliefs, Values and Policies - Conviction Politics in a Secular Age*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. In answer to the question of how the “language of transcendence, the Songs of Zion” can be translated in a secular age, Forrester offers three similar alternatives to those outlined above. “The Christian vision may be presented obliquely, indirectly - the only authentic way of presenting Christian truth, according to Søren Kierkegaard; or directly and confidently, as by Karl Barth or Reinhold Niebuhr, as providing the most adequate interpretation of reality..... or, finally, in an apparently secular idiom, as it were, free from jargon and explicitly theological language, although the substance remains firmly rooted in Christian truth.” pp.86-7.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.7. Newbigin describes the two dangers in these terms: “On the one hand, he may simply fail to communicate: he uses the words of the language, but in such a way that he sounds like a foreigner; his message is heard as the babblings of a man who really has nothing to say. Or, on the other hand, he may so far succeed in talking the language of his hearers that he is accepted all too easily as a familiar character - a moralist calling for greater purity of conduct..... In the attempt to be “relevant” one may fall into syncretism, and in the effort to avoid syncretism one may become irrelevant.” p.7.

theological importance of translation. On this basis, I would argue that it is both appropriate and necessary for preachers to be involved in translation. This does not mean literally taking on the job of a translator from the Greek or the Hebrew texts to Modern English.⁵⁹ There is already a plethora of English translations, and many well-qualified linguists.⁶⁰ It refers rather to the role, discussed in the fifth chapter of this thesis, of drawing together the world of the biblical text and the world of the listener. The examples cited from radio broadcasting in the second part of this dissertation have illustrated that one way for preachers to bridge these two worlds is through the skilled use of pictorial language. Thus, by making appropriate pictures with words the preacher can become a mediating and interpreting translator.

4. Towards A Renewed Form of Orality: Walter Ong

A *practical* theology of pictorial language cannot ignore pragmatic questions about translation. Just as linguistic translators need to know both their own language and their receptor's language intimately, so preachers, seeking to translate the relevant message of biblical texts into contemporary and engaging discourse, need to know both the world of the text and the world of their listeners. One way of entering these two worlds is to understand some of the transformations which orality has undergone. In particular, it will be suggested in this section that for preachers to be heard today they need to understand the orality to which their listeners are accustomed and to develop tools by which to translate their own discourse into forms which will engage

⁵⁹ See, for example, Kenneth Baker, editor, *The Making of a Contemporary Translation - New International Version*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1987. See especially, Herbert M. Wolf, "When 'Literal' is not accurate", pp.176-195. See also: George Steiner's fascinating: *After Babel - Aspects of Language and Translation* - Second Edition, Oxford: OUP, 1992. "*After Babel* postulates that translation is formally and pragmatically implicit in every act of communication, in the emission and reception of every mode of meaning, be it in the widest semiotic sense or in more specifically verbal exchanges. To understand is to decipher. To hear significance is to translate." p.xii.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Basil Hatim and Ian Mason, *The Translator as Communicator*, London: Routledge, 1997, especially Chapter 7 "Form and Function in the Translation of the Sacred and Sensitive Text". They argue "with the communication explosion which the world is experiencing, the translator or interpreter is being called upon, more often than ever before, to work with texts which are remarkably creative and which display marked dynamism. We have defined dynamism as the motivated removal of communicative stability." p.110. This instability further complicates the task of the translator who also intends to act as a communicator.

a range of their audiences' senses. In short, it will be argued that preachers need to develop a renewed form of orality.

Many potential preachers were, and still are, trained in reading, writing and the often "silent" world of textuality,⁶¹ rather than being encouraged to develop skills for working in an oral culture. In the words of Fred Craddock they need to give attention to "increasing their capacities for "oralizing"."⁶² To put it another way, preachers need to develop more skills in translating their ideas, which are often rooted in written texts, into oral communication. One of the contentions of this dissertation is that preachers can learn about oralizing from the ways in which radio broadcasters speak, and in particular the ways in which they create pictures with words.

In order for preachers to learn from the religious radio broadcasters considered in this thesis it is important that they translate the lessons they have gained from radio into their own particular communicative and cultural contexts. To be able to make these transitions it is vital that they recognise the contrasting forms of orality that have been engaged with in this dissertation.

The Jesuit scholar Walter Ong offers some intriguing insights into different forms of orality. It is to an analysis of his work in this area that we now turn. Ong's hypothesis that orality has undergone a series of transformations will be discussed in relation to some of the radio discourse considered earlier in this thesis. This approach will build upon his work, and especially his striking concept of "secondary orality". It will be argued first, following Ong, that orality has undergone a number of transformations. One of these shifts is from primary orality to secondary orality. Secondly, it will be argued that some of the defining characteristics of secondary orality point towards a need for the recovery of a pictorial orality in homiletics. On

⁶¹ Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985. He argues that "much of the educational process today is silent..... in many cases, an excessively large amount of seminary education will consist of listening to lectures, reading, taking notes, writing papers, and sitting for exams, all in silence." p.21.

⁶² *ibid.*, p.20.

the basis of these arguments, it will be suggested, thirdly, that Ong's concept of pictorial secondary orality can usefully be developed into a "multi-sensorial" secondary orality. The intended result is an extended understanding of the uses of pictorial orality on radio today. Behind this argument lies the belief that effective oralizing will often draw upon pictorial language.

i. Transformations of the Word

Walter Ong has written extensively on the transformations which have shaped today's orality. A prolific author and scholar, he has nearly 400 articles, monographs, chapters and books to his name,⁶³ and his influence has "been felt across the full range of the human arts and sciences".⁶⁴ He has been concerned with a wide range of topics, many of which are beyond the scope of this thesis. The study of orality and literacy,⁶⁵ however, has been a central concern of his work.⁶⁶ His bold attempt to plot the main stages in the evolution or transformation of orality also demonstrates his interest in the various revolutions in communications.⁶⁷ It also provides a useful way into understanding his concept of "secondary orality".

Ong's categories for orality provide a useful framework by which to consider the broadcast talk discussed in this thesis. He outlines clearly his understanding of the evolution of orality, in *The Presence of the Word*.⁶⁸ He identifies a number of "stages

⁶³ See: R.F. Lumppp, "A biographical portrait of Walter Jackson Ong". *Oral Tradition*, 2, pp.13-18, and "Select bibliography of Ong's writings." *Oral Tradition*, 2, pp.19-30.

⁶⁴ Bruce E. Gronbeck, "The Rhetorical Studies Tradition and Walter J. Ong: Oral-Literacy Theories of Mediation, Culture, and Consciousness," in Bruce E. Gronbeck, Thomas J. Farrell, and Paul A. Soukup, editors, *Media, Consciousness, and Culture*, Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1991, p.4.

⁶⁵ This is also the title of his most popular book: Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy - The Technologizing of the Word*, London: Routledge, 1982. (Hereafter referred to as: Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 1982.)

⁶⁶ T. J. Farrell echoes this point in: "An Overview of Walter J. Ong's Work", in Bruce E. Gronbeck, et al., editors, *Media, Consciousness, and Culture*, Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1991, p.25.

⁶⁷ See: "Preface" in Bruce E. Gronbeck, Thomas J. Farrell, and Paul A. Soukup, editors, *Media, Consciousness, and Culture*, Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1991. "The communications revolution and, more precisely, the various revolutions in communications over the centuries, have provided focus for the work of Walter J. Ong, SJ (1912-)." p.xi.

⁶⁸ Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word - Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967. See especially chapter 2, "Transformations of the Word", pp.17-110. (Hereafter referred to as: Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 1967.) This is the first

of the word”: first, the unrecorded word - oral culture, secondly, the denatured word - alphabet and print dominated culture, and thirdly the electronic word - which could be termed as an audio-visual culture. In a later work Ong sub-divides stage two, so that he separates manuscript and print culture,⁶⁹ and thereby creates a “fourfold model”⁷⁰ of orality. Farrell correctly views this as a “working hypothesis” still “open to further elaboration”.⁷¹ As such, Ong’s evolutionary pattern of orality should be viewed not as “water-tight” categories,⁷² but, for the purposes of this dissertation, a useful interpretative tool for reflecting on the discourse of religious radio broadcasters.

First, **“the unrecorded word - oral culture”**: I would contend that the sub-cultures reflected by the rural and urban American radio preachers discussed in the previous chapter retain many of the characteristics of primary orality. This can be seen by the way in which most of their radio broadcasts are extemporaneous instead of relying upon a written script. They often draw upon formulaic speech forms, and therefore frequently repeat phrases, exclamations, or particular words.⁷³

book of a wide-ranging trilogy which explores issues related to communication. The other two texts in this trilogy were: *Rhetoric, Romance and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1971; and *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977. (Hereafter referred to as Walter Ong, *Interfaces of the Word*, 1977.)

⁶⁹ In *Interfaces of the Word*, the third book of the trilogy, Ong makes a clear distinction between the two parts within this stage of “alphabet and print”. Implicit to many of the arguments in this text is his belief that the manuscript or chirographic culture is distinctive, but not entirely separate from the print or typographic culture. See, for example, chapter 1. “Transformations of the Word and Alienation”, and his discussions of “closure and print” in section three, where in chapter 9 he explores death and life in the text of the book: “Like writing, print is related to death, although the relationship is not exactly the same. It is even more definitive.” p.239.

⁷⁰ This emerged from his trilogy written “in the middle period of his scholarly career”. Thomas J. Farrell, “An Overview of Walter J. Ong’s Work”, in Bruce E. Gronbeck, Thomas J. Farrell, and Paul A. Soukup, editors, *Media, Consciousness, and Culture*, Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1991, p.35.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p.35. “The four stages of culture identified by Ong - primary oral culture, manuscript culture, print culture, and secondary oral culture - are working hypotheses that take into account certain critical data, and yet they are open to further elaboration.” The weakness of this summary is that it under-plays Ong’s qualifications to his own argument. In *The Presence of the Word*, for example, he discusses certain “complications” to and “overlappings” within his scheme. See: Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 1967, p.53. “The movement through the sequence of media is of course not merely a matter of successive reorganisations of the sensorium.”

⁷² For a useful summary and adaptation of Ong’s hypothesis see: Paul A. Soukup, “Communicative Form and Theological Style”, in Paul Soukup, editor, *Media, Culture and Catholicism*, Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1996, pp.55-66.

⁷³ For example, Curtis Stoops’ repetition of “that world of” (see Chapter 6 section 3. i, text connected with n.95 of this thesis), Toby Powers’ frequent use of “good” and “good for us to be here”,

In *The Presence of the Word*, Ong cites a number of examples to illustrate what he believed characterised communication within an oral culture. He persuasively argues that performers within an oral culture often employed repetition, formulaic and other mnemonic devices to assist the memorisation of epic stories. The use of “striking visual imagery” was one such device.⁷⁴ He argues, for example, that “oral singers are likely to favor striking visual imagery”,⁷⁵ not “merely because these are aesthetically pleasing but also because they serve as storage and recall devices - the ocular equivalents of verbal formulas.”⁷⁶ It is clear from Ong’s wide-ranging analysis of oral culture that the use of certain forms of pictorial language is by no means a new aspect of orality. It is also apparent that working extemporaneously, as most of the radio preachers do, influences the forms and style of discourse employed by speakers.

Ong does not see oral culture, however, surviving in its purest form today. In what is probably his most widely cited book, *Orality and Literacy* (1982), he argues that:

Today primary oral culture in the strict sense hardly exists, since every culture knows of writing and has experience of its effects. Still, to varying degrees many cultures and subcultures, even in a high-technology ambience, preserve much of the mind-set of primary orality.⁷⁷

The “country boys” and “city prophets” considered in the previous chapter represent subcultures that have preserved “much of the mind-set of primary orality”.

(see Chapter 6 section 3. ii, text connected with n.107 of this thesis), and the “blowing” apocalyptic radio preachers’ regular “hahing” illustrate the repetitive strain within this remarkable American oral tradition (see Chapter 6 section 3. iii, text connected with n.118 and n.123 of this thesis). It is important, however, to bear in mind that many of these preachers extensively draw upon the *written text* of the bible.

⁷⁴ Many of the parables of Jesus also reflect the use of detailed visual imagery. See: Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Imagery for Preaching*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989, especially pp.44-46.

⁷⁵ Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word - Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967, p.25. He cites Homer’s “rosy-fingered dawn” or “wine-dark sea” as examples of often repeated formulas by epic singers.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p.25. “The oral aural singer has a vocabulary of metrical phrases, fragments of verse, a huge store of verbal equipment prefabricated to fit into his verse structure, and often slightly malleable.” The world of the “unrecorded word” is one in which memory plays a more important role than our own. This manifested itself in the “older oral-aural society” where encyclopaedism had had to be a matter of poetry, combined with the other great oral-aural speech form, oratory, which in turn was largely poetic.” p.35.

⁷⁷ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 1982, p.11.

Homileticians who are immersed in a comparatively silent literary culture and who are keen to learn from such radio broadcasters, should bear in mind how many of these speakers are more closely connected to a primary oral culture. This insight may temper an overly negative judgement. Their verbal idiosyncrasies and extremisms noted earlier, may partially be products of a discursive community which defines itself through distinctive talk, rather than through speech constrained by a close adherence to a script.⁷⁸

Ong identifies the second stage of the word as the “**denatured word - alphabet and print**”.⁷⁹ I would contend that the broadcasts of C.S. Lewis discussed in the fourth chapter reflect some of the characteristics of a speaker born out of a print dominated culture. This is not an entirely surprising conclusion, as Lewis was an English Don and prolific writer. He was immersed from his childhood in stories and images from the typographic culture of written texts. Ong argues that the advent of writing and then printing, ensures that for the literate, articulation became increasingly closely linked with seeing words on the page. Unlike the extemporaneous radio preachers Lewis always read aloud a closely typed script, and appears to have very rarely, if ever, wandered away from it.

Ong perceptively highlights the links between seeing and articulating.⁸⁰ This simple, but profound observation underlines how reading relies on a visual act: seeing the text. In other words, Ong argues that the shift from “oral to written speech” is

⁷⁸ Ong argues that “oral cultures create and sustain certain specifically polemic and anxiety structures in the psyche, which are curiously calmed or at least repressed and relocated in cultures where knowledge is stored in the quiescence of writing and print.” This fascinating insight may partially explain the violent polemic employed by some American Radio Preachers and the sharp contrast it makes with the more restrained broadcasts of Tilby and Lewis. Walter Ong, “Communications Media and the State of Theology”, in Paul Soukup, editor, *Media, Culture and Catholicism*, Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1996, p.14.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, pp.35-53. In this discussion I am following Ong’s earlier *three-fold*, as opposed to his later four-fold, model of the evolution of orality. See also: William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word*, Cambridge, CUP, 1987, especially part 1; and Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, London: Ark, 1987 (1964).

⁸⁰ Ong argues: “What happened with the emergence of alphabetic typography was not that man discovered the use of his eyes but that he began to link visual perception to verbalisation to a degree previously unknown.” *ibid.*, p.50.

“essentially a shift from sound to visual space”.⁸¹ This was obviously not an instantaneous transformation.⁸² In Ong’s scheme, it was printing that led to the dominance of sight, and the “denaturing” of the word.

Ong observes a number of characteristics of the “denatured word.” In order to highlight the permanence of writing compared to the fleeting nature of spoken word,⁸³ he cites the familiar proverb: “*Verba volant, scripta manent* - words fly away, what is written stays put.”⁸⁴ For Ong, “writing and print isolate”,⁸⁵ whilst orality can build community. This point about isolation echoes an earlier suggestion in *The Presence of the Word* that:

.....a typographic culture, because it is strongly visualist, isolates the individual from the tribe even in much of his verbal activity, mutes and minimizes interpersonal communication, and elaborates the visual in all its aspects.....⁸⁶

Ong believes that these characteristics of writing, the isolating and visualist tendencies, have had considerable impact. He asserts that “more than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness.”⁸⁷ The strong implication is that it has also transformed orality.

Lewis may have oralised, through lecturing, tutoring in Oxford, and through conversing in a number of local pubs, but as an academic he did spend a considerable part of his life “silently and isolatedly” reading and writing. For some speakers, this would have been a distinct disadvantage, but Lewis’ own understanding of writing

⁸¹ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 1982, p.117.

⁸² Ong believes that “eventually”: “print replaced the lingering hearing-dominance in the world of thought and expression with the sight-dominance which had its beginnings with writing but could not flourish with the support of writing alone.” Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 1982, p.121.

⁸³ Contrast this view with an example Ong uses on at least two separate occasions. He refers to how Ambrose of Milan in his *Commentary on St. Luke* (iv.5) “speaks out of the old oral tradition,” and adds, “Sight is often deceived, hearing serves as guarantee.” Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 1967, pp.52-3. See also Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 1982, p.119.

⁸⁴ Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 1967, p.42.

⁸⁵ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 1982, p.74.

⁸⁶ Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 1967, p.283.

⁸⁷ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 1982, p.78.

novels may have eased his transition into broadcasting. Consider, for example, his advice to writers:

Avoid all epithets which are merely emotional. It is no use *telling* us that something was “mysterious” or “loathsome” or “awe-inspiring” or “voluptuous”. Do you think your readers will believe you just because you say? You must go quite a different way to work. By direct description, by metaphor and simile, by secretly evoking powerful associations, by offering right stimuli to our nerves, and by the very beat and vowel-melody and length and brevity of your sentences, you must bring it about that we, we readers, not you exclaim, “how mysterious!” or “loathsome” or whatever it is. Let me taste for myself and you’ll have no need to *tell* me how I should react to the flavour.⁸⁸

Replace the word “reader” with “listener” and this becomes pertinent advice for broadcasters and preachers. Lewis’ own popular radio broadcasts, demonstrate many of these characteristics. For example, consider his use of an “enemy occupied territory” metaphor,⁸⁹ a “fleet of ships” analogy,⁹⁰ or the “mask” story⁹¹ discussed in the fourth chapter. Lewis’s broadcasts reflect an attempt to break free from the isolated world of reading and writing, create oral pictures which would engage all the senses of his listeners, and persuade his audience of the reasonableness of Christianity.

Nevertheless, whilst Lewis did try to sound spontaneous, it is possible to detect at times that he is reading a carefully refined script. His broadcast orality relies upon the printed word. For preachers seeking to learn from Lewis’ radio practice, it is valuable to note that in some cases he is constrained by his own textuality. As the homiletician Robin Meyers argues: “preaching must recognize the difference between the eye and the ear, and its language must be both rich and sparse.”⁹² At times Lewis’

⁸⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Studies in Words*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960, p.219. Earlier Lewis explores how phrases can communicate emotion. He cites *Prometheus Unbound* and how the author makes “me imagine a boat rushing over waves, which are also identified with sounds. After that he need do no more; my emotion will follow of itself. Poetry most often communicates emotions, not directly, but by creating imaginatively the grounds for those emotions.” p.216.

⁸⁹ See Chapter 4 section 3. ii, text connected with n.118 of this thesis.

⁹⁰ See Chapter 4 section 3. iii, text connected with n.121 of this thesis.

⁹¹ See Chapter 4 section 3. viii, text connected with n.147 of this thesis.

⁹² Robin Meyers, *With Ears to Hear - Preaching as Self-Persuasion*, Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1993, p.76.

broadcasts can be so linguistically rich and so conceptually tightly argued that it is possible to lose the flow of his argument.

In many ways, C.S. Lewis serves as a good example of a literary scholar and radio broadcaster who attempts to straddle the divide between what Ong describes as the typographic word, and his final stage of orality: the **electronic word**.⁹³ Ong argues that:

The past century has seen the word enter into a new stage beyond orality and script and print, a stage characterised by the use of electronics for verbal communication.⁹⁴

Ong believes that we have “entered into the electronic age, where a new oralism served by technology reigns.”⁹⁵ There is a sequence of technological developments within this stage of the electronic word.⁹⁶

In Ong’s eyes these technological developments have led to a “new oralism” or “renewed orality”.⁹⁷ This is a highly significant point for this thesis as it suggests that the speech of broadcasters such as Lionel Blue, Angela Tilby, David Winter, R.S. Wright and even C.S. Lewis, can be seen as different examples of this “renewed orality”. This is also termed by Ong as “secondary orality” and will now be discussed in detail.

ii. Secondary Orality: “A Breakthrough to a New Kind of Orality”

On the basis of Ong’s concept of “secondary orality” it will be argued that homiletics need to develop a re-formed approach to orality. One aspect of this re-

⁹³ Ong’s title for this section is “Electronics and the Sensorium Today”, Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 1967, pp.87-110.

⁹⁴ Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 1967, p.87.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.286.

⁹⁶ Ong summarises this sequence in the following terms: i] telegraphy (electronic processing of the alphabetized word), ii] telephone (electronic processing of the oral word), iii] radio (first for telegraphy, then for voice; an extension of i & then ii.), iv] sound pictures (electronic sound added to electrically projected vision), v] television (electronic vision added to electronic sound), vi] computers (word silenced once more.....[then multi-media]). *ibid.*, p.87.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.103.

formation of language will be a renewal or re-discovery of the importance of pictorial language. It will be suggested that some of the defining characteristics of secondary orality point towards the need for the recovery of a pictorial-orality. In order to carry out this task two simple questions will be considered: What are the defining characteristics of secondary orality? Why is this “new kind of orality” significant for the case for renewing language pictorially?

Ong defines secondary orality in a number of ways. One of his most favoured approaches is to make a clear distinction between primary and secondary orality.

In *Orality and Literacy* (1982), for example, he explains his definitions:

I style the orality of a culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print, “primary orality”. It is ‘primary’ by contrast with the ‘secondary orality’ of present-day high-technology culture, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print.⁹⁸

Secondary orality is perceived by Ong as a “breakthrough to a new kind of orality, implemented chiefly by electronics.”⁹⁹ This “new kind of orality” may have similarities with primary orality, but the advent of electronic communication has not heralded a simple return to an oral culture:

This new orality has striking resemblances to the old in its participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal sense, its concentration on the present moment, and even in its use of formulas. But it is essentially a more deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print, which are essential for the manufacture and operation of the equipment and for its use as well.¹⁰⁰

Oral communication through electronic media relies, in Ong’s view, upon “writing and print”. This reliance leads to “a more deliberate and self-conscious orality”, heard in many of the *Thoughts for the Day* by contributors such as Tilby, Blue and Winter.

⁹⁸ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 1982, p.11.

⁹⁹ Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 1967, p.259.

¹⁰⁰ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 1982, p.136.

Apart from time constraints, one of the reasons for this less spontaneous approach in such radio broadcasts is that the scripts are normally the product of one person *writing* alone, with a limited amount of help from the producer on duty. "Secondary orality", according to Ong "is founded on - though it departs from - the individualized introversion of the age of writing" and "print".¹⁰¹ It is this reliance upon print which sets primary and secondary orality apart. It is also distinguishes the script-less radio preacher from the text-based *Thought for the Day* contributor. Roger Silverstone, Professor in Communications and Media, provides a helpful clarification:

What distinguishes secondary orality from primary orality is its continuing dependence on the analytical and technical and narrative skills that in turn depend on print. Secondary orality is a displaced orality.¹⁰²

Preachers seeking to learn from religious radio broadcasters such as Tilby, Blue and Winter should bear in mind that they are listening to "displaced orality". Ong explores the implications of this "displaced orality" more fully in *Interfaces of the Word* (1977):

At one end of the continuum are the electronic sound media..... Here we are in the world of secondary orality, as it may be called, superficially identical with that of primary orality but in depth utterly contrary, planned and self-conscious where primary orality is unplanned and unselfconscious, totally dependent on writing and print for its existence (try to imagine a television network operated by complete illiterates, unable to read sets of instructions, not to mention teleprompters), whereas primary orality was not only innocent of writing and print but vulnerable to those media and ultimately destroyed by them. But the aura of spontaneity and participation clings to television like a shroud, carefully pinned into position to be sure that the artificiality does not show.¹⁰³

This is a more nuanced interpretation of how "secondary orality" can give the appearance of spontaneity, but in reality relies upon print. It resonates with the work

¹⁰¹ Walter J. Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology*, Cornell University Press, 1971, p.285.

¹⁰² Roger Silverstone, "Television, Rhetoric, and the Return of the Unconscious in Secondary Oral Culture," pp.147-159 in Bruce E. Gronbeck, Thomas J. Farrell, and Paul A. Soukup, editors, *Media, Consciousness, and Culture*, Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1991, p.148.

¹⁰³ Walter Ong, *Interfaces of the Word*, 1977, p.298.

of radio broadcasters such as Lionel Blue who successfully create the illusion of spontaneity, whilst actually relying on a script. It is clear that Ong frequently contrasts “primary and secondary orality” as a way of illuminating both his meaning and some of the characteristics of secondary orality.

In *The Interfaces of the Word* (1976), for example, he again employs a similar tactic:

Secondary orality is both remarkably like and remarkably unlike primary orality. Like primary orality, secondary orality has generated a strong group sense, for listening to spoken words forms hearers into a group, a true audience, just as reading written or printed texts turns individuals in on themselves. But secondary orality generates a sense for groups immeasurably larger than those of primary oral culture - McLuhan's global village.¹⁰⁴

Ong believes therefore that this “strong group sense” is a further characteristic of secondary orality. The development of electronic communication, therefore, has extended, even shattered, the traditional barriers of space and time.

As argued in the first and second chapters of this thesis, it has also transformed the nature of public discourse.¹⁰⁵ Ong argues that:

Radio and television have brought major political figures as public speakers to a larger public than was ever possible before modern electronic developments. Thus in a sense orality has come into its own more than ever before. But it is not the old orality. The old-style oratory coming from primary orality is gone forever.¹⁰⁶

Ong pertinently argues that electronic communication has changed the nature of public speech. The discourse of American radio preachers, discussed earlier, raises questions, however, over the assertion that the “old-style oratory coming from primary orality is gone forever”.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p.136.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Chapter 2 section 2. iii of this thesis: “From Proclamation to Conversation”.

¹⁰⁶ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 1982, p.137.

Secondary orality, or “modern electronic oralism” as it is occasionally termed by Ong, is perhaps an even more complex and diverse phenomenon than Ong allows, with the vestiges of primary orality still influencing a few exceptional current broadcasting forms. These cases of broadcast “old-style oratory” represent an exception to the idea developed earlier by Ong in *Interfaces of the Word* (1977):

On television [and radio] we use public address to reach millions of persons, but to reach each one as though we were having a face-to-face conversation with him or her. Our public speaking is private speaking now.¹⁰⁷

Many of the rural American radio preachers considered earlier do not follow this pattern. They often speak or shout as if they were speaking to a large group of hundreds. By contrast, Ronald Selby Wright (Chapter 4) was an early broadcaster who recognised the importance of recreating the sense of having a private face-to-face conversation when broadcasting.¹⁰⁸

Echoing a point made in the first part of the dissertation, Ong’s case is that the “new electronic oral media” have radically altered the nature of public discourse. The marks of this shift to a new kind of orality include: “spontaneity”¹⁰⁹ and “conversational casualness”.¹¹⁰ Preachers should not ignore these transformations in orality and the lessons to be gathered from broadcasters such as Wright, Blue or Winter, who attempt to employ a conversational and apparently “spontaneous” style of speech.

¹⁰⁷ Walter Ong, *Interfaces of the Word*, 1977, p.90.

¹⁰⁸ Johnston Mackay, producer, *Ronald Selby Wright*, [Radio Programme] BBC Radio Scotland, presented by Stewart Lamont.

¹⁰⁹ Ong believes that: “The new oral electronic media - most notably radio and television - tend to promote *spontaneity*, the unrehearsed reaction of interviewee and audience.” (*Italics are mine.*) Walter Ong, “Communications Media and the State of Theology”, in Paul Soukup, editor, *Media, Culture and Catholicism*, Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1996, p.18.

¹¹⁰ Ong argues that: “radio and, more particularly, television demand a discursive and even a conversational casualness where they have occasion to present theology..... The conversational casualness is a mark of orality, but *orality of a new kind*, unlike the primary orality, which trafficked in the formality and the formulas discouraged by electronic oralism. (*Italics are mine.*) *ibid.*, p.19.

In this discussion of the defining characteristics of secondary orality a number of related points have emerged. First, secondary orality has a number of similar characteristics to primary orality.¹¹¹ It has been argued that this assertion is supported by the American radio preachers considered earlier in the thesis. Secondly, unlike primary orality, secondary orality is partially dependent upon print, which is usually seen rather than heard. Thirdly, secondary orality is sustained by electronic communication, which, given the dominance of television and film is usually viewed and listened to. Fourthly, secondary orality can transcend the traditional barriers of time and space, and so has the potential to create imagined or visualised global communities. Fifthly, old-style oratory has been replaced by secondary orality which relies on creating a feeling and picture of apparent intimacy between speaker and audience. As argued in the first part of this thesis, it has therefore created listener expectations. Sixthly and finally, according to Ong, “unlike early tribal orality, this present new orality is possible only through heavy reliance on visual constructs”.¹¹²

These defining characteristics of secondary orality illustrate the ways in which it relies to some extent upon “visual constructs”. The concept of “visual constructs” can be approached from two different perspectives. On the one hand, the form of secondary orality is determined by whether the speaker is seeing a text, reading a script or viewing a teleprompter. On the other hand, the style and content of secondary orality are also influenced by the way in which the speaker visualises the audience and the listening community.

Seeing, both literal and imagined, therefore continues to exert a significant impact upon orality. It is being argued here with Ong, that whilst drawing on words and hearing, this transformed orality also relies heavily on pictures and sight. If this is the case, it points towards the need for a developed understanding and use of what might be described as a “pictorial secondary orality”¹¹³ both in homiletics and in religious

¹¹¹ Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 1967, p.260. “Secondary orality”, according to Ong, “creates in ways reminiscent of primitive oralism”.

¹¹² *ibid.*, p.260.

¹¹³ This is my own term. “Pictorial” has been added to Ong’s term “secondary orality”.

broadcasting. Speakers need to acknowledge the shift into secondary orality, but also recognise listeners' reliance upon seeing and imagining "visual constructs".

iii. From "Pictorial Secondary Orality" to "Multi-Sensorial Secondary Orality".

The term "pictorial secondary orality" implies a variety of acts: visualising absent audiences as Craig Soaries did, visualising appropriate aspects of the biblical text as Angela Tilby does, and making use of both impressionistic and representational pictorial language as C.S. Lewis did. As argued in the introduction and first chapter of this thesis, a new language has also developed in the last decade in homiletics, underlining the importance of "making movies with words".¹¹⁴ This approach might be another aspect of "pictorial secondary orality". These approaches will be discussed in greater detail in the conclusion to the thesis.

As the Radio Bishop Don Taylor and David Winter also argue, the danger of relying entirely upon pictorial language is that it might lead to what Ong describes as the "insatiable hunt for striking visual presentation, "the speaking picture"."¹¹⁵ Visual presentations may create immediate impact, but alone they are often unable to engage the imagination. Even pictorial language, another form of "the speaking picture", may sometimes fail to communicate. Given this limitation, perhaps the concept of "pictorial secondary orality" should be extended to a "multi-sensorial secondary orality", which recognises the role of all five senses in the communication process. As cited above, C.S. Lewis argued for the importance of verbally "offering the right stimuli to our nerves" and stimulating the taste buds through a sensitive use of language. Ong makes this case more explicitly when he argues:

Besides the visual imagination and its imagery, there are also auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile imaginations and imageries: acts of these senses, too, can be and are called into consciousness in the known absence of an external object.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1996, p. 267, and see also p.183 and p.255. He suggests for example on p.264: "In a small way we again become movie directors".

¹¹⁵ Walter Ong, *Interfaces of the Word*, 1977, pp.131-2.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.131.

This more comprehensive understanding of the imagination adds to the available resources for the speaker.

It also points towards Ong's Jesuit background. This is more clearly seen in his fascinating and sensitive study on *Hopkins, the Self and God*,¹¹⁷ where in one section he explores how Hopkins' Jesuit background may have influenced his attention to "particularised detail"¹¹⁸ and encouraged his "flexible particularism".¹¹⁹ In this text Ong argues that Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* encourages the use of the five senses in the imagination. First, imagining people and their contexts *visually*, secondly, *hearing* in the imagination what they might say, thirdly, savouring the "smell of the infinite fragrance", fourthly, *tasting* "the infinite sweetness of the divinity" and finally developing an imaginative sense of *touch*.¹²⁰ Ong believes that "Ignatius' attention to physical detail certainly encouraged Hopkins' cultivated Victorian particularisations".¹²¹ The case is a persuasive one, especially when read alongside some of Hopkins' poetry rich in pictorial language and word music.¹²²

It could be inferred from Ong's acuteness in identifying the connection between Ignatian spirituality and the multi-sensorial imagery of Hopkins' poetry, that Ong has himself also travelled the road of the *Spiritual Exercises*. This perceptive work on Hopkins illustrates Ong's own sensitivity towards widening the imaginative act beyond simple visualising. As suggested earlier, in *Interfaces of the Word* he puts forward a more comprehensive understanding of the potential of the imagination. It is also possible to infer from both *Interfaces of the Word* and *Hopkins, the Self and God* that Ong believes that language has the potential to evoke not only sight, but also sound,

¹¹⁷ Walter J. Ong, *Hopkins, the Self, and God*. Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1986. (Hereafter, Walter Ong, *Hopkins, the Self, and God*. 1986.)

¹¹⁸ Walter Ong, *Hopkins, the Self, and God*. 1986, p.65.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.66.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, p.71. (*Italics are mine.*)

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p.72.

¹²² John Hayward, editor, *The Faber Book of English Verse*, London: Faber and Faber, 1958, pp.386-390. See for example Hopkins' poems: "Heaven-Haven", "Spring" and "Pied Beauty". See also W.H. Gardner and N.H. MacKenzie, editors, *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, Fourth Edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970. "We must note the variety, originality, and organic function of his imagery, which is closely bound up with his diction and rhythm". p.xxxiv.

smell, taste and touch. On the basis of this extended understanding, it is therefore possible to extend the concept of “pictorial secondary orality” to a more multi-sensorial approach to secondary orality.¹²³ In a communicative context where listeners’ senses are bombarded from a range of sources, preachers should move on from simply “oralizing pictorially” to “oralizing multi-sensorially”.¹²⁴

It has been suggested that Ong’s understanding of the development of orality, and in particular his concept of “secondary orality”, provide a useful framework by which to interpret the examples of communication discussed earlier in the thesis. Preachers intent on constructing a practical theology by learning from the sets of case-studies in this thesis, would benefit from recognising the various tones of orality that have been analysed. They could be categorised as: televisual secondary orality (chapter 3), print based secondary orality (Lewis) and pre-television secondary orality (Wright) (chapter 4), post-television secondary orality (chapter 5) and cultural critical primary/secondary orality (chapter 6).

The verbal and visual language considered in these chapters does not represent a return to tribal orality. It is a more complex phenomenon, with examples of breakthrough to a “new kind of orality”. This was initially termed by this author as “pictorial secondary orality”, but further consideration of Ong’s work has widened the field to “multi-sensorial secondary orality”. The argument has developed to suggest that language can evoke the whole range of the senses. The case being put forward, therefore, is for the recognition and development of a “multi-sensorial secondary orality” by preachers. The theological grounding of such an approach will be set out towards the end of the following section. It will be argued that this has the potential to reconcile the divide between word and image identified by another prolific author: Jacques Ellul.

¹²³ James Jones provides a good example of a radio broadcaster who appeals multi-sensorially to listeners. A vivid portrayal of his garden nesting “in the shade of the Humber Bridge” is balanced by an evocative description of his barbeque: “We strew herbs on to the charcoals, an incense to create the **smell** of being in the South of France.” *Thought for the Day*, on *Today*, Radio 4, 16 August, 1996.

¹²⁴ In short, they should use words to appeal verbally to sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. For a homiletician who agrees see: Jay E. Adams, *Preaching With Purpose - The Urgent Task of Homiletics*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1982, especially chapter 14, “Sense Appeal”.

5. Towards a New Language: Jacques Ellul

In this fifth section I will develop the case for this renewed approach to orality, which reconciles word and image through what has been described as “multi-sensorial language”. As this chapter’s argument is moving towards a practical *theology* of this form of discourse, the theological grounding for such an approach will be outlined. This will take place in dialogue with the work of Jacques Ellul. It will be argued first, on the basis of Ellul’s early work *The Presence of the Kingdom* (1948), that there is a “problem of communication” and a need to “discover a new language”. Secondly, Ellul’s thesis, made explicit in *The Humiliation of the Word* (1985), that sight is triumphant and the word has been humiliated, will be briefly outlined. Following on from this sociological analysis, Ellul’s belief in the theological primacy of the word and its conflict with the image will be investigated. Thirdly, this two-sided thesis will then be evaluated and challenged. On the basis of this exposition and critique it will be suggested that Ellul’s apparent dialectic between word and image may contain both the seeds of reconciliation and the theological foundations for a “multi-sensorial secondary orality” which is built upon contemporary language.

Jacques Ellul, “one of the most original and prolific Christian social critics of this century”,¹²⁵ produced “over 50 published volumes and well over 1000 articles”.¹²⁶ A respected Professor of Law and Sociology at Bordeaux University (1947-1980), he explored diverse issues from historical, sociological and theological perspectives.¹²⁷ He was a passionate writer, who according to Clifford Christians, “smashes our

¹²⁵ Andrew Goddard, “Obituary - Jacques Ellul (1912-1994)” in *Studies in Christian Ethics*, Volume 9, Number 1, pp.140-153, 1995, p.140. For further biographical details see: *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and Work*, edited by William H. Vanderburg, and translated by Joachim Neugroschel, New York: Seabury Press, 1981, especially chapter 1.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p.140. See also two other useful texts: i) Joyce Main Hanks, compiler, *Jacques Ellul: A Comprehensive Bibliography*, Greenwich, Connecticut: Jai Press, 1984 ; Research in Philosophy and Technology, Supplement 1, 1984. (This text also contains a biographical profile, pp.xi-xiii.) See also ii) Darrell J. Fasching, “A Guide to Reading Jacques Ellul” and “Bibliography” in his excellent: *The Thought of Jacques Ellul: A Systematic Exposition*, Toronto Studies in Theology, Volume 7, New York and Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, pp.207-216.

¹²⁷ As professor emeritus from 1980 till his death in 1994, he continued to write prolifically, maintaining his interest in many fields, including communication and the word.

modern idols, exposes false claims, insists on demythologizing today's illusions, and stands us squarely before the bloody face of history." ¹²⁸

Ellul claimed that "he had, from the beginning, conceived his books as an ensemble". ¹²⁹ One of the recurring themes within this vast body of work is his concern for language, ¹³⁰ and more specifically the word. ¹³¹ As a sociologist and theologian Ellul's passionate interest in language and communication manifested itself in a number of guises. It developed over his career, but remained a significant element in his thinking until his death, aged 82, in 1994. Darrell Fasching comments:

The word has been the overwhelming concern of Jacques Ellul's life-long work. There are two aspects of this: Firstly, the devaluation of spoken and written language in an image-centred mass media society. However, this is bound up with the second aspect: the centrality of the word of God in the Judeo-Christian tradition. ¹³²

This section will focus primarily on two works in which this two-fold concern for the word is made explicit. I will argue that both *The Presence of the Kingdom* ¹³³ and *The Humiliation of the Word* ¹³⁴ provide further useful support for the case for a renewed approach to orality. This critical discussion will again point towards the need to develop a "multi-sensorial secondary orality" built upon pictorial language.

¹²⁸ Clifford Christians, "Technology and Triadic Theories of Mediation", in Stewart M. Hoover and Knut Lundby, *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*, London: Sage, 1997, p.77.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, p.140.

¹³⁰ See: Joyce Main Hanks, "Preface", in Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1985. Translated from the French *La parole humiliée* (1981) by Joyce Main Hanks. (Hereafter referred to as: Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 1985.)

¹³¹ Darrell J. Fasching, "The Liberating Paradox of the Word", in "Perspectives on Jacques Ellul" in *Media Development*, Vol. XXXV, 2/1988, p.8.

¹³² *ibid.*, p.8.

¹³³ Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, London: SCM, 1951, first published as *Présence au monde moderne: Problèmes de la civilisation post-chrétienne*. Geneva: Imprimerie Roulet & Cie, 1948. (Hereafter referred to as: Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 1951.)

¹³⁴ Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 1985.

i. “*We need a new form of Communication*”

The case for a renewed approach to orality, proposed earlier in this chapter, finds support in Ellul’s small but forceful book *The Presence of the Kingdom* (1948). The thrust of his argument, while set out in differing terms, resonates with the contentions both in Chapter 3 of this thesis, that we need to develop critical awareness of our media-saturated context, and in Chapter 5 that we should aim to develop a form of discourse which connects with listeners. His discussion of “the problem of communication”¹³⁵ may have initially been addressed to a French speaking post-war audience, but it still echoes one of the underlying concerns of this thesis: to break down communication barriers in a context where it is possible to be overwhelmed by the electronic mass media.

“The Problem of Communication” is the title of Ellul’s fourth chapter in *The Presence of the Kingdom*. It was published in 1948 in French in Geneva. Ellul wrote this text prior to the rise and popularisation of television. Radio, newspapers and cinema were the most significant forms of mass communication. Nevertheless, many of his remarks are still relevant to a television and post-television age. One of his repeated calls, which, as mentioned above, echoes part of the conclusion of Chapter 3 of this thesis, is the appeal to his readers to develop some sense of heightened awareness of their cultural context:

It is absolutely essential that Christian intellectuals should understand the decisive character of our epoch, and that if we were to renounce this effort to become aware of it, an effort which demands the whole of our personality, we would be traitors to God, and we would also be traitors to the world in which we live.¹³⁶

This impassioned call to become aware of (*prendre conscience de*) our complex social reality, is based upon the belief that the decisive character of our epoch can be seen through an interpretation of our mass-mediated environment.

¹³⁵ Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 1951, see Chapter 4, “The Problem of Communication”.

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, p.125.

In *The Presence of the Kingdom* Ellul identifies a number of characteristics of the post-war media context. They have a surprisingly contemporary ring. First, there is an incoherence developed by the rapid flow of information: "News succeeds news without ceasing".¹³⁷ Such information-overload can become a "distraction",¹³⁸ where the intellectual is "absolutely defenceless when confronted by the mass of news which reaches him [sic] from every quarter."¹³⁹ Ellul writes in this text like a "watchmen on the walls, a herald of warning".¹⁴⁰ Secondly, for Ellul, there is apparent powerlessness in the wake of the one-way mass media: "There is no discussion with the radio or with the press."¹⁴¹

Beyond a heightened awareness of the situation Ellul calls for the discovery of a new language:

The characteristic work to-day of the Christian intellectual is to discover a new language, a language which helps men [sic] to understand one another, in spite of publicity, a language which permits men to abandon their despairing solitude..... The search for a new language which will give a purer meaning to the words of the tribe, with all that this means of submission to the real (our language is totally dissociated from the real) and an adaptation to different

¹³⁷ Ellul continues: "For instance, in the columns of the newspaper he [the Christian intellectual] will read one day about an affair which quickly disappears from the paper, and also from the brain of the reader. It is replaced by others; it is forgotten..... He [sic] gets used to living in complete incoherence. *ibid.*, p.101. For a parallel argument relating to more recent communication technologies see: Jacques Ellul, "Some thoughts on the responsibility of new communication media" in "Perspectives on Jacques Ellul" in *Media Development*, Vol. XXXV, 2/1988, p.3. "Speed is one of mass media's laws, with the result that news broadcast at midday is not repeated in the evening. It is replaced by other urgent news. All of this means that even if one listens attentively, one cannot get to the heart of anything."

¹³⁸ Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 1951, p.105. Nevertheless, for Ellul, humanity needs a certain coherence, for we: "cannot submit to being simply an eye which registers, without understanding, the jerky images of a mad kaleidoscope." *ibid.*, pp.101-102.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, p.106. See also Ellul's more extensive work on "Propaganda" to understand how he believes the individual is put under much psychological and societal pressure through the mass media. Jacques Ellul, *Propagandes*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1962. (Eng. trans. *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*. New York: Random House, 1973.) "Propaganda is the inevitable result of the various components of the technological society." p.160.

¹⁴⁰ See: Clifford Christians, "Ellul on Solution: An Alternative but No Prophecy", in Clifford Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, editors, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretative Essays*, Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1981, p.149. "Intellectuals [according to Ellul] must be watchmen on the walls, heralds of warning; but regrettably, they seem as vulnerable to sociological propaganda as anyone."

¹⁴¹ Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 1951, p.105.

mental structures, a language which should be a living expression of the words of St. Paul, "all things to all men".¹⁴²

This reads a little like a manifesto for a new way of using language which will help "people understand each other", abandon their "despairing solitude", and be more connected with reality. Ellul unfortunately does not go into detail about the nature of this new language. In a way reminiscent of the *Thought for the Day* contributors such as Blue and Winter discussed earlier in Chapter 5 of this thesis, he does, however, underline the importance of connection and contact among humans.¹⁴³

For Ellul the creation of a new language is a vital task: "If we do not invent this language all our preaching of love cannot be understood by men."¹⁴⁴ He develops this call towards the end of the book:

We need *a new form of communication* between human beings, in order that the relations between them, distorted by the conditions of life, by class feeling, by prejudice, may, by a renewal of their intelligence, be recreated upon a personal and living plane.¹⁴⁵

This cry for a new form of communication is all the more urgent when read parallel to a later text by Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment* (1972).¹⁴⁶ In this text he devotes a section to the "Death of the Word", and briefly considers "the disintegration of language". This is a theme which he develops more explicitly in *The Humiliation of The Word*.

¹⁴² *ibid.*, p.127.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, p.127. This, he believes, is a task attempted not only by Christians: "For the Christian intellectual this problem of language is the key-problem to contact with other men. Other people, too, have felt this need. Other people have sought for this language, but they have only ended up in a more hopeless solitude." This reads like a selective view of history, especially when it is placed alongside Ellul's argument that there is precedent in the past for Christians to be successful with this creative linguistic act: "Now at different times, in the course of Christian history, Christians have rediscovered a language." *ibid.*, p.128.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.128.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.143. (Italics are mine)

¹⁴⁶ Jacques Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*. New York: Seabury, 1973. Translation C. Edward Hopkin. (First published as *L'Espérance oubliée*. Paris: Gallimard, 1972.)

This text, according to one commentator, finds many of its themes pre-figured in *The Presence of the Kingdom*:

Except for certain changes of emphasis and the addition of technical and sociological developments since 1948, *The Humiliation of the Word* can be viewed as the development of Ellul's early concerns about language in *The Presence of the Kingdom*.¹⁴⁷

Even taking this earlier foundational work into account, *The Humiliation of the Word* represents his most systematic exploration of the relationship between word and image. It has been argued in this section that even in the late 1940s, just after Wright's and Lewis' war-time broadcasts, Ellul perceived a break-down of communication, which led him to call for the development of a new language which might re-establish connection between people. He is not advocating the development of an "Esperanto" style language. Instead, he appears to be using this "new language" motif as a provocative metaphor to increase "awareness" of the disintegration of language, the isolation of individuals and the importance of developing a "personal" communication based on trust.

One of the contentions of this thesis is that there is a need to continue to develop a "new language" for Christian preaching. This renewed language is built upon the ancient art of creating pictures with words. A "multi-sensorial" use of language, based upon pictorial language, has the potential to be part of what Ellul described a "new form of communication", and what this author terms as a "renewed form of communication". For some preachers this act of translation may simply be an extension of current practice. For other homileticians trapped within discursive communities and still drawing upon primary oral traditions it may mean a re-formation of certain preaching practices. The renewed form of preaching, fusing Ellul's and Ong's categories, is built upon an "awareness" of how the advent of "secondary orality" confronts the Christian communicator with new challenges. How, for

¹⁴⁷ Joyce Main Hanks, "Preface", Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 1985, p.viii.

example, can a form of oral communication be developed where, as scholars such as Ellul argue, sight is apparently “triumphant” ?

ii. *Sight Triumphant?*

In the first part of this thesis it was argued that we now inhabit a “new communicative environment”, where we are bombarded by a host of electronic images. This contention also finds support in Ellul’s third chapter of *The Humiliation of the Word*, “Sight Triumphant”. This provides further support for the case for developing a renewed orality. Ellul argues that “images today are very different from those in earlier societies”,¹⁴⁸ where “nature was people’s only image”.¹⁴⁹ By contrast today we are overwhelmed by a “proliferation of artificial images”.¹⁵⁰ Ellul persuasively reminds his readers that: “A universe of images surrounds us: photos, films, television, advertising, billboards, road-signs, illustrations etc.”¹⁵¹ As argued earlier this image-saturated context inevitably has serious implications for homiletics.¹⁵²

This analysis is reinforced by his discussion of television. Ellul believes that the weekly film images are “augmented, reinforced, and accentuated by the daily images of television or the newspaper”.¹⁵³ This regular bombardment builds a “screen” or “circle” of “images” which is “placed between me and my world”. The result is that they are “truer than my own life.” Television, for Ellul, is a “supremely powerful drug.”¹⁵⁴ In discussions of both film and television, Ellul does not support his contentions with any empirical data. As he does in *The Presence of the Kingdom*,

¹⁴⁸ Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 1985, p.112.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.113.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.114.

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.114.

¹⁵² See especially Chapter 3 of this dissertation, and the discussion of electronic stereotypes. Ellul’s specific analysis of film, for example, is provocative for preachers attempting to engage with their communicative context: “Frequent film watching creates a new personality and leads to a kind of addiction while at the same time aggravating internal lack of balance in the imagination or emotions. Obviously every frequent film-goer is not thus poisoned, but his personality is modified by the world of images whose company he keeps, as they super-impose themselves on the real world.” *ibid.*, p.119.

¹⁵³ *ibid.*, pp.119-120.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.120.

Ellul is working with a model of the mass media as a highly powerful expression and instrument of what he has famously described as “the technique”.¹⁵⁵

Our immersion in a “universe of images” is like a theme tune which runs through this chapter and much of the rest of *The Humiliation of the Word*.¹⁵⁶ Ellul forcefully argues:

Our eyes’ function has been extraordinarily expanded. Our brain is constantly receiving the impact of imaginary sights and no longer of reality. Today we can no longer live without the reference and diversion provided by images. For a large proportion of our lives we live as mere spectators.¹⁵⁷

The implications of the “omnipresence of images” is deeply serious for Ellul.¹⁵⁸ They create a “substitute reality”,¹⁵⁹ a “magic lantern universe”,¹⁶⁰ which “gums up our thinking”.¹⁶¹ Images, in Ellul’s opinion have been “substituted for the rigor of language”.¹⁶² They act like “lightning, attacking us from all directions”.¹⁶³ The result of such an “image explosion” is that the mass media “surrounds us with images. The

¹⁵⁵ For extensive discussion of the term “technique”, see Ellul’s trilogy on this theme: i) *La Technique ou l’enjeu du siècle*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1954. (Eng. trans. *The Technological Society*, New York: Knopf, 1964.) ii) *Le Système technique*, Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1977. (Eng. trans. *The Technological System*, New York: Continuum, 1980.) iii) *Le bluff technologique*, Paris: Hachette, 1988, includes discussion of television, and the unpredictability of “technique”. (Eng. trans. *The Technological Bluff*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990.) Clifford Christians provides a helpful working definition: “*La technique* [the technique] is Ellul’s term for the modern mind in which efficiency becomes a normative claim for all human activity, including the technological process.” Clifford G. Christians, “Is Ellul Prophetic?” in “Perspectives on Jacques Ellul” in *Media Development*, Vol. XXXV, 2/1988, p.7.

¹⁵⁶ Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 1985, p.126.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.126.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.126.

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p.128.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.221.

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.129. See also Ellul’s fascinating earlier book discussing propaganda. *Propagandes*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1962. (Eng. trans. *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes*. New York: Random House, 1973.)

¹⁶² *ibid.*, p.129.

¹⁶³ *ibid.*, p.144. See also: Darrell J. Fasching, “The liberating paradox of the word”, in “Perspectives on Jacques Ellul” in *Media Development*, Vol. XXXV, 2/1988, p.9. Fasching perceptively relates such views to Ellul’s thoughts on “media propaganda”. “The constant flow of events portrayed through the media drowns the individual in a kaleidoscope of disconnected and uncoordinated imagery and information. Overwhelmed by the flood of sensory stimuli and disoriented by the constantly shifting geography of the hourly headlines, individuals are reduced to stereotyped gut reactions, shaped by societal propaganda.”

multiplication of visual techniques has produced this invasion of our eyes and thoughts by images.”¹⁶⁴ According to Ellul, invasion has led to domination: “Images captivate our attention, fascinating us and filling us with hallucinations, so that we abandon everything.”¹⁶⁵

Recent empirical data by communication scholars challenge some of Ellul’s more extreme assertions.¹⁶⁶ Michael Real, for example, believes that:

..... as a generalist, he [Ellul] sometimes lacks familiarity with specialised studies, opinions muscle aside evidence, and unfounded generalizations result about the role and effect of a particular individual medium or research method.¹⁶⁷

In contradiction to Ellul’s suggestion above, audiences are more sophisticated and more selective than to “abandon everything” because of the image explosion. Nevertheless, in spite of such critical qualifications, his general point about our immersion in a “universe of images” appears to be a strong one.

iii. Word Humiliated?

Lack of empirical data does not prevent Ellul developing his forceful argument that sight is triumphant and the word has been humiliated:

¹⁶⁴ Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 1985, p.148. Later he argues that the people have placed their confidence in the “multiplication of artificial visual images”. The result is that “thousands of changing images scatter my attention, provoking hallucination and hypnosis as I am submerged in them.” p.192.

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p.129. “The image monopolizes: either you watch television or you do not, but you cannot watch television while writing letters or doing dishes in the next room..... Through this process they divert us from lived reality.”

¹⁶⁶ See: Roger Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life*, London: Routledge, 1994, and David Morley, *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge, 1992. For example, it appears that many people do watch television while eating, washing up or even writing homework. Ellul’s argument that the image, represented by the television in this case, necessarily monopolises needs to be qualified.

¹⁶⁷ Michael R. Real, “Mass Communications and Propaganda in Technological Societies”, in Clifford Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, editors, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretative Essays*, Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1981, p.124.

Images are enticing, captivating, and, strictly speaking, hypnotic, whereas this is not at all true of the word transmitted by radio. In order to listen properly to the radio, one must decide to do it, make a choice, decide to listen, and apply oneself to what is most difficult. Unless as usually is the case, the radio only broadcasts background music, rather than words. People leave the radio on, whether it is broadcasting music or talk, while not really listening and while talking about something else. The reduction of the word to mere background is obviously more serious than silence or the abandonment of language. It represents the devaluation of any possible content this word might have; it means utter contempt.¹⁶⁸

This picture of leaving the radio on in the background, merely talking to itself, also illustrates Ellul's perception of how the word has been marginalised. Ellul believes that there is considerable contempt for the word today.

This is a theme he develops further in a chapter on "The Word Humiliated". Unlike Ong, who is more circumspect and descriptive of orality's transformations, Ellul is uncompromising in his analysis. In the fourth chapter Ellul states that: "the situation of the word in our society is deplorable".¹⁶⁹ For Ellul there has been a "devaluation of words"¹⁷⁰;

The word is greatly mutilated, cadaverous, and almost dead, but we must become conscious of what this means: our whole civilization is loathed along with the word. The word signals our civilization's possible death and provides the channel through which the poison can get in.¹⁷¹

This semi-apocalyptic and highly dramatic language underlines how in Ellul's eyes the word is "humiliated, crushed, and meaningless".¹⁷² He suggests that the invasion of images has led to us live in a "wasteland of empty verbiage".¹⁷³ There is now a

¹⁶⁸ Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 1985, p.149.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.155.

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p.156.

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*, p.254.

¹⁷² *ibid.*, p.254.

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, p.156.

“contempt for language”¹⁷⁴ and a “hatred of the Word”.¹⁷⁵ Ellul’s critique resonates with one of the American radio preachers, Winnifred Garner, discussed earlier, who complained that people “know more about movie stars..... than they do about the Word of God.”¹⁷⁶ Ellul believes that in the final analysis this conflict between word and image goes to the heart of the Christian faith.

iv. Primacy of the Word?

This leads us to the second, more explicitly theological strand within *The Humiliation of the Word*. On the one hand, it has been shown earlier how he argues in sociological terms that technologically constructed “artificial images”¹⁷⁷ have devalued language and speech. On the other hand, he posits in theological terms that “biblically everything leads back to the word.”¹⁷⁸ This debatable assertion merits closer attention. Ellul argues: “From beginning to end, the Bible deals only with the word.”¹⁷⁹ This assertion is expounded from a variety of viewpoints in his second chapter on “Idols and the Word”. In one forceful section, for example, he argues:

“The Word was made flesh” also means since the Word of God was incarnate, what is visible is forever excluded. The *invisible* God came as *word*. He cannot be recognised by sight. Nothing about Jesus indicates divinity in a visual way.¹⁸⁰

This interpretation is supported by a variety of assertions.¹⁸¹ For Ellul, “seeing a photograph of Jesus would not prove anything more and would add nothing to his

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p.162. See, also, Rod Mengham, *The Descent of Language*, London: Fontana Press, 1995 for more recent discussion on this theme.

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p.172.

¹⁷⁶ See Chapter 6 section 3. iii of this thesis, “Blowing Apocalyptic Radio Preachers”, text connected with n.118.

¹⁷⁷ Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 1985, p.206.

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p.69.

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p.48.

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p.56.

¹⁸¹ These include: during his “ministry Jesus only *speaks*”, p.172., “miracles” as “signs of the word” are “only accomplished through the word”, p.56. and “nothing visual can show us the glory of the Lord”. *ibid.*, p.58.

words”.¹⁸² Examples from Genesis and Exodus are used to demonstrate that “biblically everything leads back to the word.”¹⁸³

Ellul goes further and argues that “in reality, the biblical revelation is radically opposed to everything visual. The only possible relationship with God is based on the word, and nothing else. This is because the biblical God speaks, and does nothing else.”¹⁸⁴ This is one reason why “it is out of the question to try to grasp God through sight”.¹⁸⁵ A range of expositions of scriptural texts are used to support this contention. For example, echoing the American radio preacher Curtis Stoops,¹⁸⁶ Ellul cites Romans 10:

“Faith comes by hearing”, says Paul (Rom. 10:17, JE). It comes by hearing exclusively, and absolutely never from what one sees.....
Sight is utterly excluded from the faith relationship.¹⁸⁷

It is important to recognise that Ellul is not arguing that “the word is good and that sight is evil”,¹⁸⁸ nor, so he states, is he intending to claim “that hearing and the word are *superior* to sight and image.”¹⁸⁹ He is, however, asserting the primacy of the word in God’s communication:

God’s revelation is conveyed by the human word - by the word and nothing else. Action, miracles, and works only accompany and authenticate the word as demonstrations and accessories. Without the word they are nothing. Only the word can convey the word of God, the sole means God used to reveal himself to us.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸² *ibid.*, p.84.

¹⁸³ *ibid.*, p.69.

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p.71.

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p.72.

¹⁸⁶ See Chapter 6 section 3. i of this thesis, “The Singing Radio Preacher”, text connected with n. 99.

¹⁸⁷ *ibid.*, pp.80-81.

¹⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p.102. He continues: “I simply insist that the word belongs to the order of truth and sight to the order of reality.”

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p.230.

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p.107.

Behind this case lies Ellul's considerable reliance upon the Swiss theologian Karl Barth.¹⁹¹ "It is essential", according to Fasching, to see Ellul "as carrying forward the tradition of dialectical theology associated with Karl Barth".¹⁹² Ellul's theological method in *The Humiliation of the Word* is dialectical¹⁹³ in the sense that he sees the image and word in "opposition".¹⁹⁴

v. *Word and Image in Conflict?*

He entitles, for example, his fifth chapter "The Religious Conflict between Image and Word".¹⁹⁵ This is a theme which runs throughout the text. For Ellul the word "is in fundamental opposition to the image".¹⁹⁶ This "conflict between sight and word has to do with the ultimate value a society adopts for itself."¹⁹⁷ This "strange opposition between word and image",¹⁹⁸ cannot be reconciled till the "end of time".¹⁹⁹

¹⁹¹ See: Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "Barth's Influence on Jacques Ellul", in Clifford Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, editors, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretative Essays*, Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1981. "It should be notedthat for the most part only in the area of biblical exposition and dogmatics does Ellul lean heavily on Barth." p.47.

¹⁹² Darrell J. Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul: A Systematic Exposition*, Toronto Studies in Theology, Volume 7. New York and Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, p.6. Fasching argues this is necessary in order "to understand Ellul's theological response to the emergence of the technological society". It is important to acknowledge, with Fasching, that Ellul himself emphasised that he has "never been an unconditional 'Barthian'." Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1976, p.8.

¹⁹³ See also Jacques Ellul, "On Dialectic", pp.291-308, in Clifford Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, editors, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretative Essays*, Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1981.

¹⁹⁴ Ellul also places in dialectical opposition "reality" and "truth", linking them with image and word respectively. Thus natural theology is critiqued by a logo-centric revealed theology which resonates with the work of Barth. "The Word is related only to Truth. The image is related only to reality." Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 1985, p.27. For Ellul the image can only deal with surface "realities" and "appearances", it is unable to communicate truth. The word, by contrast, "alone has the capacity to enter the domain of the truth." Darrell J. Fasching, "The Liberating Paradox of the Word", in "Perspectives on Jacques Ellul" in *Media Development*, Vol. XXXV, 2/1988, p.10.

¹⁹⁵ Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 1985, pp.183-203.

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p.111.

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.195.

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p.90.

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p.184.

This is a point that he repeats in a number of ways.²⁰⁰ He bases his argument on a particular interpretation of “seeing”, “vision” and “faith” in the Gospel of John. It is almost as if Ellul uses this Gospel as a lens through which to reconstruct the word and image conflict.²⁰¹ His reading of John points towards a reconciliation between word and image which is still to come:

Thus the long-awaited reconciliation of image and word and of truth and reality is certain, but we must not try to manufacture it with our techniques and metaphysics here and now.²⁰²

On the basis of this belief in the “certainty” of the eschatological reconciliation between word and image, he believes that we should now begin living “its reality as a promise”.²⁰³ In a fascinating essay “On Dialectic” Ellul explains in more detail his understanding of the dialectical tension between “promise and fulfilment”, between “the Already and the Not Yet”.²⁰⁴

This belief in the value of dialectic provides a valuable interpretative tool by which to make sense of *The Humiliation of the Word*; in particular, his conclusion where he argues for the renovation of language. This will not itself bring about reconciliation between word and image, but it is a way to work in the midst of this contradiction. His call, therefore, for the use of both “understandable language”²⁰⁵ and “open language”,²⁰⁶ is founded upon an understanding that the word still has a vital role to play before the “end point” of history. He even suggests that “anyone wishing to save humanity today must first of all save the word”.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p.255. “We must continually remind ourselves that although the reconciliation comes *at the end*, and only at the end, it is both *already given* (in the knowledge and conviction of what will take place at the end) and not yet realizable..... We must not pretend the end has already come and that we can therefore fuse or synthesize.” p.255.

²⁰¹ *ibid.*, pp.242-254.

²⁰² *ibid.*, p.255.

²⁰³ *ibid.*, p.259.

²⁰⁴ Jacques Ellul, “On Dialectic”, p.300, in Clifford Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, editors, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretative Essays*, Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1981. It is in this tension or “contradiction”, he argues, that “Christian life is set.” *ibid.*, p.300.

²⁰⁵ Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 1985, p.263.

²⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p.263.

²⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p.254. “We must restore its [the word’s] royal domain and demands.”

According to Ellul one way of “saving the word” is the use of “understandable language” and “open language”. This approach is a clarification of his call in *The Presence of Kingdom* for the development of a “new language”. First, he draws support for “comprehensible language” from the teaching of Jesus, who “speaks everyone’s language” and had a “determination to use reasonable language”.²⁰⁸ Ellul also asserts that Jesus “avoids hermetic language, double meanings and elliptical expressions. Parables are rather a means of conveying meaning.”²⁰⁹ One interpreter argues that Ellul is urging a recovery of the “love of language”, so that it is “saved from being reduced to technical manipulative communication.”²¹⁰

Secondly, he underlines the importance of struggling for “an open language”, which “permits a continual adventure”, and works against the tendency of language to become “ideologically closed”.²¹¹ Such accessible and open language has the potential to bring freedom and a foretaste of the reconciliation of word and image.

This section has outlined the two central strands of thought within Ellul’s *The Humiliation of the Word*. First, based upon a sociological analysis, he argues that the “delicate balance between seeing and hearing has been shattered. Now, due to the explosion of the mass media, the image dominates over the word.”²¹² Secondly, Ellul views the word as God’s sole form of revelation, in conflict with the image. He concludes by arguing that this conflict was reconciled through the life and work of Christ, but this was not yet visible or completed.²¹³ This complete reconciliation is guaranteed but will not take place until the end point in history.²¹⁴ Safe in the knowledge of this future reconciliation, we should, according to Ellul, hear the call

²⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p.263.

²⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p.263.

²¹⁰ “The love of language fosters clear and coherent communication, critical reflection and creative action.” Darrell J. Fasching, “The Liberating Paradox of the Word”, in “Perspectives on Jacques Ellul” in *Media Development*, Vol. XXXV, 2/1988, p.10.

²¹¹ Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 1985, p.263 and p.264.

²¹² Darrell J. Fasching, “The Liberating Paradox of the Word”, in “Perspectives on Jacques Ellul” in *Media Development*, Vol. XXXV, 2/1988, pp.9-10.

²¹³ Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 1985, p.255.

²¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.254. Ellul describes the “endpoint” in this context as “the metahistorical moment reached after the historical process of contradiction.”

to become iconoclasts, and contend “for an understandable language for communication and work for the continually renewed opening up of everyday language.”²¹⁵

This section has so far provided general support for the case for a renewed approach to orality. In Ellul’s understanding the word has a both a confrontational and a creative role. Confrontational, since words can be used to shatter the hold of stereotypical or artificial images; and creative, since open, everyday language has the potential to liberate us from the “flood of sensory stimuli.”²¹⁶ It has not yet however provided explicit evidence for the development of a “multi-sensorial secondary orality”. A case will be made, however, following the critique of Ellul’s work, that such language also has the potential for a reconciling role between word and image.

vi. Towards a Multi-Sensorial Theology of Communication

In this section the two central two strands of Ellul’s argument in *The Humiliation of the Word* will be examined. On the basis of this critique a qualified model will be put forward to suggest that word and image can in fact be reconciled through the development of a multi-sensorial secondary orality.

First, Ellul’s sociological view that sight is triumphant and the word has been humiliated should be questioned. Ellul provocatively states that “in the audiovisual realm the image is king. The word, practically useless, is in any case a serf, not an equal.”²¹⁷ The cumulative evidence of this thesis challenges this assertion. Chapter 1 demonstrated how a renewed concern with visual language, spoken words and the development of the imagination in the field of homiletics has generated increased confidence in the future of public oral discourse. Chapter 2 provided evidence of how

²¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.255.

²¹⁶ Darrell J. Fasching, “The Liberating Paradox of the Word”, in “Perspectives on Jacques Ellul” in *Media Development*, Vol. XXXV, 2/1988, p.9.

²¹⁷ Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 1985, p.218.

talk radio has survived the potential crisis of television and has created the opportunities for word-artists to flourish. Chapter 3 considered the theological implications of and responses to an “audio-visual culture”. In particular, the specific words or oral texts of particular television broadcasts were analysed in detail. Chapters 4 and 5 provided examples of how conversational pictorial language has been used as a bridging device by a range of broadcasters; and Chapter 6 demonstrated how certain broadcast oral idiosyncrasies, insider discourse, and passionate enthusiasm could become a barrier or a bridge between listener and speaker. In short, the range and diversity of orality discussed underlines how the word has by no means been vanquished by the image.

Another French scholar, theologian and critic of the mass media, Pierre Babin, would go even further:

Many over the years have noted that we entered a civilization of the image. My hypothesis, though, is based on a claim that we are living not so much in a civilisation of the image as in one of the vibration. Vibration conditions the ear much more than the eye. The dominant sense, therefore, is hearing, as is evident from the behaviour of young people with their Walkmans.....²¹⁸

This provides a further challenge to Ellul’s belief that sight is triumphant in our electronic age. Babin’s belief in “aural supremacy”,²¹⁹ should be qualified, however, by his own assertion that we have become “fragmented people”:

We crumble into fragments because everything we see on television, everything we hear on the radio, and everything we read in magazines comes to us piece by piece, without any logical connections - an advertisement, a song, a catastrophe, a report, or the pope’s blessing.²²⁰

²¹⁸ Pierre Babin, with Mercedes Iannone, *The New Era in Religious Communication*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991. (Translated by David Smith), p.58.

²¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.60.

²²⁰ *ibid.*, p.42. Contrast R.S. Wrights’ 10 to 15 minute talks with the more fragmentary 2 minute 45 second *Thought for the Day*. Most *Thoughts* often have no direct connection with the preceding or following piece.

On the basis of Babin's analysis and the earlier discussions in this thesis, I would contend that both eyes and ears are assaulted by electronically formed images and sounds. Neither Ellul's belief that sight is triumphant, nor Babin's understanding of aural supremacy does justice to the evidence presented through the previous six chapters of this thesis. We "live and move and have our being" in an audio-visual culture, where both words and images are vying for attention. A practical theology of "multi-sensorial secondary orality" must recognise this fact.

Secondly, Ellul's theological view that "God's revelation is conveyed by the human word - by the word and nothing else" is also open to question. A detailed and line-by-line critique of Ellul's extensive exegesis would not necessarily advance this current argument. Instead, it is worth drawing from a Johannine source a verse which Ellul appears to ignore in his case for the primacy of the word:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life - the life was made manifest, and we saw it.....²²¹

Notice the sensual nature of the verbs: heard, seen, looked upon and touched. This appeal to the senses may have been a way of refuting the Gnostic heresy that Jesus was not really human. It also reflects how the revelation of "the word of life" was perceived by at least one group of early Christians as a multi-sensorial experience.

This is a point supported by French theologian and broadcaster, Gérard Heinz. In an article, "God's revelation is not by words alone",²²² which is drawn from his published doctoral thesis,²²³ he argues persuasively that "God reveals himself

²²¹ 1 John 1:1-2. RSV.

²²² Gérard Heinz, "God's revelation is not by words alone" in *Media Development*, 4/1981, Vol. XXVIII, pp.34-38. Heinz has worked for Radio France and FR3 and as a television producer for FR3's Third Channel.

²²³ Gérard Heinz, *Radiodiffusion et Télévision: approches théologiques*, Strasbourg: University of Strasbourg, 1981.

plurisensorially to the world through word and image.”²²⁴ He clarifies this point by admitting that “God ‘speaks’ mainly verbally”,²²⁵ but that the:

Biblical word cannot be reduced to exclusively verbal expression, but is a vivid and active reality. It is simultaneously verbal word, image, vision, sign, dream, mysterious encounter, feeling of presence etc.²²⁶

Heinz cites a range of biblical examples to support his argument. These include: Isaiah, in the temple, seeing the “Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up”,²²⁷ and Ezekiel seeing visions,²²⁸ and then being commanded literally to *eat* the scroll of lamentation which tastes of honey.²²⁹ He also cites 1John 1:1²³⁰ arguing that “Revelation culminates as such in the incarnation which is also the highest degree of plurisensoriality.”²³¹ Heinz’s thesis represents an important counter-argument to Ellul’s belief that “biblically everything leads back to the word” and that “the biblical revelation is radically opposed to everything visual.” In the words of Martin Marty, Ellul “despises compromise”,²³² and this tendency clearly influences his defence of God’s revelation through the word. Many of Ellul’s readings of specific texts appear to have been coloured by his passionately held presupposition that the word is “theological king” and is in religious conflict with the image.

Ellul’s preoccupation with defending the spoken and heard Word leaves a muted version or rather a colourless form of Christianity. Such a view has little room for the God of Genesis 1 who *saw* that creation was good,²³³ or the Lord of Genesis 8

²²⁴ Gérard Heinz, “God’s revelation is not by words alone” in *Media Development*, 4/1981, Vol. XXVIII, p.35.

²²⁵ *ibid.*, p.35.

²²⁶ *ibid.*, p.36.

²²⁷ Isaiah 6:1.

²²⁸ Ezekiel 1:15. “I saw a wheel upon the earth....”

²²⁹ Ezekiel 3:1-3. “Son of man, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the House of Israel Then I ate it; and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey.”

²³⁰ He adds part of verse 3: “What we have seen and heard we declare to you so that we together may share in a common life.” *ibid.*, p.36.

²³¹ *ibid.*, p.36.

²³² Martin Marty, “Introduction”, in Clifford Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, editors, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretative Essays*, Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1981, p.10. “Ellul invites the reader into the web of anti-technique thought and despises compromise.”

²³³ Even in these references were used metaphorically of God, they remain significant images of God’s relation to creation.

who smelt the burnt offerings on the altar, or the God of Exodus who used the visual symbols of a burning bush or pillar of smoke as signposts for his people, or the God of John's Gospel who sent the Word to become *visible* flesh. Ellul deals with many of these strands in the biblical literature in a myopic fashion; in particular, he does not seem to do justice to the tradition which puts emphasis upon "what we have seen with our eyes".

In the synoptics Jesus heals the blind,²³⁴ paints vivid word pictures,²³⁵ and makes use of "visual aids" such as children and fig trees.²³⁶ In the Gospel of John, as Ellul himself admits,²³⁷ sight is closely linked with belief and understanding.²³⁸ For Paul the visible creation can reveal some of God's invisible nature,²³⁹ and the resurrection appearances are foundational for his faith.²⁴⁰ Even if the prologue of Hebrews begins with a reminder how "God has spoken of old" and also how "in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son", it continues with a graphic description of one who "reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature".²⁴¹ This diverse and brief outline illustrates how God's revelation is not necessarily entirely limited to verbal communication.

This viewpoint finds further support if the sacraments of the Eucharist and Baptism are taken into consideration. They have been described as visible words (*verba visibilia*). Augustine famously argued that: "The Word comes to the element; and so

²³⁴ Mark 10: 46-52.

²³⁵ See, for example, Mark 4, (Matthew 13 and Luke 8)

²³⁶ Mark 10: 13-16 (see also Matthew 19 and Luke 18). The fig tree episode can be found in Mark 11: 20-25. (Matthew 21).

²³⁷ Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 1985, pp.242-254. Ellul considers the Gospel of John in considerable detail. He admits that: "the verb 'see' recurs continually (more than 100 times) and is undoubtedly one of the essential themes of this book." p.243.

²³⁸ John 9 is probably the most explicit example of this theme running throughout John.

²³⁹ Romans 1:19 ff.

²⁴⁰ 1Corinthians 15:3 ff.

²⁴¹ Hebrews 1:1-3.

there is a sacrament, that is, a sort of visible word.”²⁴² Following this statement, Jenson perceptively explains that:

In speaking of “visible” words, Augustine primarily contrasted the *invisible* word: God’s own knowledge and intention of himself and his works, the inner reality of all that truth which God knows and is.... God’s inner truth comes to be spoken “visibly”, in ways accessible to our senses.²⁴³

According to this interpretation a “visible sign” need not only appeal to sight, it can be accessible to all our senses. Listening to the story of the last supper, seeing the bread broken and tasting the bread and wine is a multi-sensorial experience. This sacrament engages the senses of hearing, sight, touch, taste and even smell. It therefore goes beyond the bounds of a simple verbal act of an “acoustic community”.²⁴⁴

Jenson also believes that the gospel itself goes beyond purely “verbal” communication:

We might say in modern jargon: the gospel is complete communication, embracing “verbal” and “non-verbal” communication - though to be faithful to Christian insight into the divine reality of the word, we should say “more-than-verbal” instead of “non-verbal.”²⁴⁵

The Eucharist, for example, goes beyond the verbal: it is a more-than-verbal visible sign.

In the light of this discussion, the brief biblical survey and also the evidence advanced by Heinz it appears that Ellul’s use of the biblical tradition appears to be over selective. His portrayal does not do justice to the God who reveals himself not only through words but also through visible and tangible signs. Even if one is committed

²⁴² Augustine, *In Johannem*, 80, 3. See also Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine* for an extensive discussion of the relationship between signs and the senses of seeing/hearing. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, translated by D.W. Robertson, New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958 (c.396), p.35ff.

²⁴³ Robert W. Jenson, *Visible Words - The Interpretation and Practice of Christian Sacraments*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978, p.4.

²⁴⁴ W. Storrar, *Scottish Identity - A Christian Vision*, Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1990, p.118.

²⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.5.

to “the primacy of the Word”, such a view does not necessitate an Ellulian type rejection of all forms of “more-than-verbal” revelation. If this is the case, then the theological foundations for a “multi-sensorial secondary orality” have been laid. This third section has challenged and qualified Ellul’s two central arguments in *The Humiliation of the Word*. First, it has been argued empirically that sight is not entirely triumphant and the spoken word is not humiliated in the modern world. Secondly, it has been argued that Ellul’s understanding of how God reveals himself is too narrow. It needs to include a multi-sensorial perspective which recognises the role that more-than-verbal visible signs have to play in revelatory communication.

It is probable that the extreme nature of Ellul’s language, argument, and dialectic is in itself a prophetic ploy to awaken his audience to the danger posed by artificial images and the great threat the word itself faces.²⁴⁶ For example, whilst he argues that “theologians, priests and pastors are contaminated by the relentless triumph of images”,²⁴⁷ Ellul would nevertheless regularly take students to the cinema to see and then discuss the latest film.²⁴⁸ This implies a theologian less concerned about contamination by electronic images than this text initially implies. One of the final images he offers in *The Humiliation of the Word* is of a “person chained fast, by his feet and wrists, with forged chains. He has no way of freeing himself. You come with a sledgehammer and break his chains.”²⁴⁹ This materially entirely negative act has the effect, according to Ellul, of liberating the captive and giving him freedom if he wants it. In this memorable book it is almost as if Ellul has attempted to iconoclastically liberate his readers from what he perceives as the bondage brought about by the humiliation of the word and by the bombardment of artificial images. On this basis, Ellul’s dialectic and the supposed conflict between word and image appear to have a liberating intention.

²⁴⁶ It is important on these grounds to avoid an over literalistic interpretation of Ellul, and recognise that he is employing a rhetorical device to encourage reflection on how we think and view the world.

²⁴⁷ Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 1985.

²⁴⁸ “Jacques Ellul - a profile” in “Perspectives on Jacques Ellul” in *Media Development*, Vol. XXXV, 2/1988, p.2. “Ellul directed a film club in Bordeaux from 1945 to 1955, leading discussion on the themes of selected films.”

²⁴⁹ Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 1985, p.268.

Ironically, I would argue that Ellul is himself chained by this particular methodology which draws upon a prophetic negativity. He has, as Fasching also argues, put great effort into “demythologizing the word”, through a range of dialectical devices, but he has put “little effort into demythologizing” or *translating* “the gospel.” It is as if Ellul sees “the gospel language as contradicting the world simply by virtue of being antiquated”.²⁵⁰ In this context, “demythologizing the gospel..... does not mean doing away with its message, but recognizing that the message is only good news when it takes on flesh, when it speaks to human beings in contemporaneous terms.”²⁵¹ This principle of embodiment is an important insight for preachers constructing a practical theology of multi-sensorial orality.

It has been shown earlier that Ellul argues for an accessible and open language, but he does not develop this point extensively. In fact he fails to make an explicit link between his call for a new language and his discussion of an image-dominated culture. Any attempt to connect with or speak to others in contemporary terms needs to be sensitive to our cultural context. Babin argues for the use of “symbolic language”, which he believes “was Jesus’ language” and “is the dominant language of the media today.”²⁵² The case has been put here for a “multi-sensorial secondary orality” which would draw upon similar pictorial language. Preachers employing such a form of communication would need to be sensitive both to contemporaneous forms of orality and to the multi-sensorial and embodied theological foundations of Christianity.

*Conclusion: “Taste and See that the Lord is Good ”*²⁵³

The argument of this chapter has moved through a number of stages. It began with a practical example: a Jamaican-born “radio bishop” who *translates* his message into

²⁵⁰ Darrell J. Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul: A Systematic Exposition*, Toronto Studies in Theology, Volume 7. New York and Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, p.178.

²⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp.178-179.

²⁵² Pierre Babin, with Mercedes Iannone, *The New Era in Religious Communication*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991. (Translated by David Smith), p.146.

²⁵³ Title taken from Psalm 34:8. “O taste and see that the Lord is good!”

to engage not only the visual, but also the aural imaginations of his listeners. This was followed by a theological justification of the practice of translation, a practice which many of the religious radio broadcasters considered in earlier chapters use. Translation, it was suggested, finds support in an incarnational theology: The Word was translated into flesh, and this sets the precedent for further acts of translation.

There followed a reiteration that preachers, seeking to translate the message of ancient biblical texts into contemporary and accessible terms, can learn from the practice of pictorial translation used by some of the religious radio broadcasters considered earlier.²⁵⁴ In order to gain particular lessons from these broadcasters, it was suggested that preachers will also need to understand the particular forms of orality that are employed. Ong's transformations-of-orality-thesis provided the framework for such an analysis. The argument therefore shifted to identify various forms of primary, print and secondary orality exemplified by American and British broadcasters such as Toby Powers, C.S. Lewis, and Lionel Blue respectively. Ong provides another important link in the argument because his work on "secondary orality" combined with his text on Hopkins, informed by his own Jesuit background and theology, points towards the importance of preachers developing a multi-sensorial secondary orality.

On the basis of these insights it was also suggested that preachers can learn about how to break out of the "silent" print culture of the text, to a new kind of "multi-sensorial secondary orality" which has the potential to engage indirectly a range of their listeners' senses. The theological basis of such an approach was set out in the context of a critique of Ellul's narrow understanding of how God communicates. Such a practical theology of "multi-sensorial secondary orality" also has the potential to bridge a fundamental divide: the divide between those who argue for the primacy of the word in preaching and those who assert its bankruptcy in the face of the cultural supremacy of the image.

²⁵⁴ It is worth noting that many of these sacred texts were born out of an oral tradition. See: William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word - Oral aspects of scripture in the history of religion*. Cambridge, CUP, 1987, and especially, Chapter 5, "Holy Writ and Holy Word", pp.58-66.

In this chapter, three important procedures for developing a practical theology of pictorial and multi-sensorial orality have been identified: first, grasping the theological centrality of the “translation principle”, second, understanding the need for a renewed approach to orality, and thirdly, grappling with the multi-sensorial revelation of God. For preachers, the practical implications of these three processes could be summarised imperatively as: Translate into accessible, pictorial and distinctive discourse. Oralise in conversational, “spontaneous” and imaginative terms. Stimulate listeners with words not only pictorially, but also multi-sensorially. The leading Catholic homiletician Robert Waznak echoes these conclusions when he persuasively argues:

From the beginning, the Gospel was preached not in sacred languages but in the language of the people. Jesus spoke Aramaic, Paul used *koine* Greek, Origen chose not the stylized rhetoric of the academy but the familiar discourse of his culture. We too must proclaim the Gospel in our own day in words, images and forms that are called for by our video culture.²⁵⁵

This chapter has outlined a framework for a practical theology of pictorial and multi-sensorial orality for preachers seeking to communicate effectively in an audio-visual culture. The exposition of the translation and embodiment principles has supported the case for a renewed form of orality which will engage the senses of easily distracted listeners. This argument is based upon a belief in the importance of preachers acknowledging their message’s distinctive historical roots as well as engaging with their specific cultural context. If this is achieved, then attempts to act as a bridge between the world of the text and world of the listener may be successful.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Robert P. Waznak, “Preaching the Gospel in a Video Culture” in Paul Soukup, editor, *Media, Culture and Catholicism*, Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1996, p.143.

²⁵⁶ For a critique of the “Bridge Metaphor” see: Michael Quicke, “Preaching for the Next Millennium” in *The College of Preachers Fellowship Paper*, No.103, June 1997, pp.9-21. Quicke argues: “I believe that it is essential that we further develop the rather static, partial and apparently straightforward model of that bridge. It is not enough to visualise preaching as an arc which goes through 180 degrees with the Bible on one side, the listeners at the other side, and the preacher making the connection.” Instead he places the preacher and listeners in a “dynamic cycle” which “powers 360 degrees back to God”. p.17.

Conclusion

This thesis began with a deceptively simple question which faces both preachers and radio broadcasters: How do you communicate orally and effectively in a society where a whole range of audio-visual stimuli compete for your congregation's or audience's attention? From this initial question a line of argument has developed which has been based upon a variety of explorations into: homiletics; radio history, theory and practice; certain audio-visual texts; British and American religious radio broadcasting and practical theology. I have suggested that preachers can learn both positively and negatively from the practices of religious radio broadcasters. This conclusion will attempt to elucidate some of these lessons.

1. Development of Argument

Before clarifying these insights, it will be useful briefly to recapitulate the thrust of the argument to this point. It was argued in **Chapter 1** that a rapidly evolving communicative environment had led to a crisis in the field of homiletics. In the midst of today's Babel of electronic audio-visual stimuli, the prognosis for preaching still looks uncertain. A number of homiletical responses to this crisis were identified. These included emphasising the importance of developing a multi-perspectival approach to movement in sermons, a conversational style of discourse and a form of speech which imaginatively engages all the senses: words which you can see, smell, touch, taste, hear and feel. It was argued that whilst homileticians have drawn upon the language and forms of television and film to make such points, the language and forms of radio have generally been ignored. This is surprising, as speech radio has more obvious parallels with preaching than with either film or television. At the heart of both preaching and speech radio is the spoken word: the implication behind this discussion was that preachers can also learn from radio broadcasters.

Chapter 2 focused on the world of radio, and speech radio in particular. It was argued that radio has experienced a crisis, yet has, to many commentators' surprise,

survived. In spite of the emergence of television, it has not only survived, but in many areas prospered. The renaissance of radio has seen a number of transformations in its form and content. For example, technological developments have changed radio from being a largely communal activity with listeners seated around the radio set into a portable, individualistic and privatised activity. Radio's openness to adaptation, however, may be a lesson for homileticians. Radio broadcasters' ability to adapt to new forms of orality and discourse may have contributed to its survival. More specifically it was argued, contra Arnheim, that a significant weapon in the radio broadcaster's armoury is the ability to fire the listeners' imagination with pictorial language. This remains, even today in a televisually dominated culture, one of the great strengths of radio. Ronald Falconer, a highly experienced Scottish religious broadcaster, put the point well when he argued over twenty years ago:

In radio we make our own pictures; on television they are made for us by another..... Whatever the radio programme, whether drama, documentary or act of worship, we are in a more active state, mentally, than when we watch its television equivalent.¹

It has been argued that part of the power of pictorial language is its ability to engage the imagination, and so force the listener to collaborate "as an active participant".² Preaching, which employs this approach and allows listeners to make their own pictures, has the potential to involve listeners in a more dynamic mental state.

By contrast the act of watching the television or a film often demands less "active" imaginative participation. Nevertheless, televised or cinematic material, as it was suggested in **Chapter 3**, can contribute towards the communicative environment in which the listeners' religious imagination develops. In order to answer questions such as: how do you communicate issues of faith and belief orally in a society where a whole range of audio-visual stimuli compete for your listeners' religious imagination? it is vital first to attempt to make theological sense of our media-saturated

¹ Ronald Falconer, *Message, Media and Mission*, The Baird Lectures, Edinburgh: St. Andrew's Press, 1977, p.92.

² Adam Clayton Powell III, "You are What You Hear" in *Radio: The Forgotten Medium*, 1995. p.75.

environment. This goes beyond “civil defence from media fallout”,³ to a critical theological engagement with our communicative context: a task which neither preachers nor religious broadcasters should ignore. A detailed analysis of particular television broadcasts was carried out in order to root the discussion in specific audio-visual texts and thus protect it from being lost in superficial generalisations.

A variety of possible approaches to such theological engagement were outlined in the this chapter. The approach advocated was based upon a call for preachers to become interpreters who will act as both iconoclasts and iconographers. A number of audio-visual texts were analysed. They were used to demonstrate a variety of points: first, that there is a tendency towards stereotypical portrayals either of faith or of the focal points of faith in current mainstream British television, and secondly that such portrayals and assumptions can be countered, even built upon, not only visually, but also orally. In the face of our audio-visual world, therefore, this chapter became a call for preachers and broadcasters to act as oral interpreters, oral iconoclasts and oral iconographers. A contention of this chapter was that the spoken word, as used by preachers and radio broadcasters, still has an important role to play even in the wake of a plethora of audio-visual productions.

Examples of religious radio broadcasters who act in different ways as oral interpreters, oral iconoclasts, and oral iconographers were analysed in the following three chapters, the second part of this dissertation. It was implied that these religious radio broadcasters were attempting, in different ways, to engage their listeners’ religious imaginations. Another fascinating study would be to evaluate the effectiveness of their attempts; such a reception analysis represents another important set of questions which would be worth further investigation, but is beyond the scope of this thesis.⁴

³ See: M. McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, London: Routledge, 1962.

⁴ For a recent example of research based on the reception of religious television see: Alf Linderman, *The Reception of Religious Television - Social Semeiology Applied to an Empirical Case Study*, Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1996. “The main objective of this treatise has been the development of a model for empirical television audience reception studies.” p.189. Some of the insights from this impressive study would be transferable for a future project on “The Reception of Religious Radio.”

On the basis of the large listening figure estimates for Lewis and Wright, it is possible to argue that both broadcasters must have connected in some way with their listeners in the 1940s. With the help of radio, both had gone beyond the boundaries of their own discursive communities. This was partially facilitated by their use of pictorial language. It was demonstrated in **Chapter 4** that in different ways they had employed a range of pictorial language: representational, impressionistic and metaphorical.

This was also true of Blue, Tilby and Winter, broadcasters in the 1990s considered in **Chapter 5**. They, like their broadcasting predecessors, use pictorial language in differing, but effective ways. First, they use it iconoclastically to counter stereotypes and misunderstandings. Secondly, they use it to aid in the critical interpretation of our world. Thirdly, they use it iconographically to try to make abstract theology accessible, to create alternative worlds, to add colour to their narrative, and thereby engage the visual imagination of their listeners. Fourthly, at times they even use pictorial language multi-sensorially. At the heart of the fifth chapter was the argument that pictorial language has the potential to build a connection or bridge between the broadcasters' theologically informed world views and many of the listeners' more secular modes of discourse.

More specifically their use of visual, active and concrete pictorial language offers a useful reminder for preachers looking to identify lessons from broadcasting practice. It is important to underline the fact that pictorial language is not the only technique employed by Tilby, Blue and Winter. Rather it works in conjunction with other devices they use as they attempt to develop their listeners' fields of discourse, realms of meaning and horizons of faith.

Religious radio broadcasters may have widely differing aims and methodologies. This was demonstrated in **Chapter 6**. A range of discourses employed by certain American radio preachers was used to illustrate how other aural signs can become blocks, even barriers for listeners outside the speaker's own discursive community.

This chapter also provided a significant qualification to our understanding of pictorial language as a bridging device. In the fragmented world of American radio preaching it was used in two further ways: first, as a vehicle for biblical narrative, and second, as a tool for conveying autobiographical stories. The diverse range of this primary source material also usefully illustrated how some religious radio does not rely upon pictorial discourse. It can moreover become trapped within discursive ghettos. In short, some of these examples of religious radio highlight practices to be avoided by preachers. Nevertheless, these radio preachers may also have positive insights to offer preachers, such as highlighting the possibilities and risks of both using emotion in preaching and being liberated from an over-restrained Radio 4 style of speaking.

Some of the theological foundations for the overall argument were outlined in the final part of this dissertation: **Chapter 7**. It was suggested that a practical theology of pictorial for preaching cannot ignore either our transformed discursive situation⁵ or the Johannine understanding of the incarnation as the word becoming flesh.⁶ On the basis of a critical reading of aspects of Willimon, Ellul and Ong's work, and further reflection on the empirical data analysed in the earlier chapters, it was argued that the theological principles of "translation" and "embodiment" are particularly significant for this thesis. The Word "translates" into flesh and thus is embodied.

Stanley Grenz argues that the task of Christ's disciples: "is to *embody* and *articulate* the never-changing encounter with the triune God".⁷ It is interesting to note how he links the words "embody" and "articulate". It was implied in the seventh Chapter that a practical theology of pictorial language should seek to bring together embodiment and articulation.

⁵ See discussion on Walter Ong in Chapter 7 section 4 of this thesis.

⁶ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996, p.174.

⁷ *ibid.*, p.174.

The reason for this is that preachers are involved in a process of translation, articulation and embodiment.⁸ Moreover on the grounds that the Word was embodied in the person of Jesus Christ, it was suggested that God communicates not simply via the sense of hearing, but also through the other senses. If this is the case, then a multi-sensorial approach to pictorial language would do more justice not only to the empirical data of this dissertation, but also to the theological foundations explored in the seventh chapter.

These seven chapters have teased out a number of nuanced dilemmas which face preachers and which lie behind the original question of how to communicate orally in a society where audio-visual stimuli compete for audiences' attention. These dilemmas have included, first, how have preachers adapted and how should they *adapt* to this rapidly evolving communicative environment? Secondly, how can preachers modify and *translate* their discourse, without compromising its content, in an attempt to connect with their listeners? Thirdly, how can preachers *inculturate* their discourse in such a way that it has the potential to counter electronic stereotypes of faith and the divine? A practical theology for preachers should seek to learn from the ways religious radio broadcasters attempt to adapt, translate, and inculturate their messages by using pictorial or multi-sensorial language.

2. Lessons for Preachers

Can we go further? Does the data furnished by this dissertation enable us to draw any more specific conclusions that could conceivably aid modern preachers in their task? Do the earlier discussions suggest, at least in general terms, ways in which the quality and effectiveness of preaching might be enhanced? Such conclusions have to be drawn with some caution. Communicative situations are by their very nature subject

⁸ See: Thomas G. Long, *The Senses of Preaching*, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988. In Chapter 4 Long, a former radio announcer (p.5), emphasises "The Embodiment of Preaching". He describes listening to Sunday morning worship on his car radio. "What I heard almost drove me to the conclusion that services of worship should never, under any circumstances, be broadcast on the radio." p.79.

to dynamic change and transformation. Nevertheless, on the basis of the evidence of the previous seven chapters four single imperatives spring to mind: **listen**, **picture**, **edit**, and **translate**.

i. Listen

First, the data strongly indicates the importance of preachers *listening* carefully to the cultural and communicative context outside their own discursive community, as well as to the biblical traditions, the concerns of their audience and the musicality of their speech. I would agree with David Schlafer's contention that: "Listening is more fundamental than speaking in the activity of preaching, so the most important task for any preacher is to become a good listener."⁹ Certain religious broadcasters, such as some of the American radio preachers considered earlier, appear to be listening only to their own discursive communities' interpretation of biblical traditions. The result is a form of discourse which excludes outsiders. This limited listening therefore leads to a closed discursive style. It is a style which is unlikely to succeed in holding listeners' attention.

Listening also involves being sensitive to the appropriateness and musicality of particular words. Robin Meyers speaks of shopping for words, hunting for the "plumpest and ripest words, thumping" them against the "ear and *listening* for the sound quality. What is soft or bruised" should be "put back", and the discerning preacher should dig down, and "find something fresher",¹⁰ and therefore more resonant with their message. C.S. Lewis demonstrates this skill in a number of his radio talks. For example, in the first of his *Four Talks on Love*,¹¹ he discusses *Storge*, which he translates as "affection" - the humblest of the loves:

⁹ David J. Schlafer, *Surviving the Sermon - A Guide to Preaching for Those Who Have to Listen*, Cambridge, Boston, Massachusetts: Cowley Productions, 1992, p.22. "The speaking of a sermon arises from listening to all kinds of voices." p.23. See, also, Colin Morris, *Raising the Dead - The Art of the Preacher as Public Performer*, London: Fount, 1996, pp.104-8. He argues that: "one of the essential qualifications of the true preacher, is the ability to listen as well as to speak; indeed, preaching is essentially a listening vocation." p.105.

¹⁰ Robin R. Meyers, *With Ears to Hear - Preaching as Self-Persuasion*, Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1993, p.75. (*Italics of "Listening"* are mine.)

¹¹ C.S. Lewis, (cassettes) *Four Talks on Love: Storge, Philia, Eros, Agape*, Atlanta: The Parish of the Air, The Episcopal Radio-TV Foundation, 1970. Tape One, "Storge". These talks were recorded in

To produce *storge* in public is like getting your household furniture out for a move. It was all right in its native place, but it looks tawdry out of doors. It lives with humble, undressed, private things: The thump of a drowsy dog's tail on the kitchen floor. The sound of a sewing machine. Easy laughter and easy tears on some shrewd and wrinkled old face. A toy left on the lawn..... It's to our emotions what soft slippers, and an easy almost worn chair and worn out old clothes are to our body.¹²

Notice how some words such as “thump” act onomatopoeically, and how Lewis also refers to the “sound of a sewing machine”. “Tawdry”, “drowsy” and “shrewd” combine precision and sound quality. Thus he appeals not only to the visual imagination, but also to the aural sensitivities, both by his choice of words and by his reference to commonly heard sounds. Preachers would also do well to listen to their sound environment and to the music of the words they use.

Preachers can go further and listen in their imaginations to the sound environment of specific biblical texts. For example, consider such an approach to the story of the paralytic man being lowered through the roof in Mark 2:1-12. Assuming a critical and thoughtful reading of the text, the preacher could then imagine themselves to be radio reporter or producer.¹³ Questions to consider include: What would the microphone pick up? Are there background noises? Which voices stand out? What

London on 19 and 20 August, 1958, and broadcast in parts of the USA. They were seen by certain Bishops as too “frank” for a general American audience. One of Lewis’ biographers, George Sayer, was critical in his assessment of these talks: “The recordings are not an impressive performance. For one thing they are spoken too fast. For another they sound like they are being read. There is little of the admirable broadcasting technique of years before, which made every listener feel personally addressed.” George Sayer, *Jack - A Life of C.S. Lewis*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997 (1988), p.388. Sayer’s critique is fair up to a point. Lewis does, however, slow his delivery down and he attempts to include his listeners by using a number of accessible images in each of these four talks. Lewis used the radio script as a basis for a book: *The Four Loves*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1960, see p.35 ff.

¹² *ibid.*, Tape One, “Storge”.

¹³ Compare Paul Scott Wilson’s “movie-making” approach in *The Practice of Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1996. He suggests that “once a responsible, scholarly understanding of the text is assured, the preacher presents that understanding in highly visual and vital ways. Ask, “If I were to make a movie of this text, what decisions would I need to make” (e.g., Is it night? Is there a breeze? Who is present? What are people wearing? Is there something unusual? What sounds are there?) As in a movie, most of these items are background items, those that the camera merely notes in panning; central action and dialogue are what the camera seeks. A few of these incidental details need not distort the determined thrust of the biblical text. Rather, they are an important dimension of effective communication in a multimedia world.” p.183.

sound is created as the roof is being opened? How loud are the grumbling scribes or the healing words of Jesus? How noisy is the crowd response to the healing? Is the paralytic silent as he walks out in front of the crowd? This imaginative leap into the soundscape of the text could provide speakers and listeners with fresh insights into well-known stories.

Such textual listening combined with careful listening to our communicative setting will help prevent speakers retreating into “the language and sounds of Zion”. Instead, in the words of Buttrick, preachers must “search the language of human conversation and, once more, find images and metaphors to proclaim the gospel.”¹⁴ This act of searching will begin with listening to the form and content of everyday spoken language. Lionel Blue, David Winter, and in a different context Gregg Thomas, are good examples of broadcasters who listen carefully to and employ everyday language. There is a strong precedence for such an approach to be found in the roots of Christianity. Pastor and homiletician Edward Markquart argues provocatively that:

If you could have tuned Jesus in on the radio, you would *not* have known he was a preacher by the sounds of his religious tones or by his phrasing of biblical clichés. His language was fresh, secular, and part of the world in which he lived.¹⁵

For some of the radio preachers discussed and certain *Thought for the Day* contributors not considered specifically in this thesis, it is hard to miss the “religious tones” of their speech. Nevertheless, broadcasters such as Tilby and Blue do demonstrate a “fresh” form of discourse, rooted in careful listening. This listening approach has much to teach preachers.¹⁶

¹⁴ David Buttrick, *Homiletic - Moves and Structures*, London: SCM, 1987, p.194. He continues: “What we cannot do is fall back on stock theological terminology to any great degree. Instead, in our age, we must speak in a language of common image and metaphor, but do so with theological wisdom.”

¹⁵ Edward F. Markquart, *Quest for Better Preaching - Resources for Renewal in the Pulpit*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985, p.178. (*Italics are mine.*)

¹⁶ This point is also strongly supported by James Jones who explains that as a preacher he has learnt again the importance of “listening” from doing *Thought*. “I think every sermon ought to be a dialogue. The dialogical nature is that you are for ever hearing what people are hearing, and you’re thinking “as I say this what will people be saying?” And so your next paragraph has to deal with

ii. *Picture*

Connected to the first imperative, to listen, is a second point: *Picture*. Many of the broadcasters who have been analysed in this dissertation point towards the need to picture both the listeners' concerns and the scene or written text that is being evoked. Selby Wright's graphic description of a lonely gunners' station, or Lewis' memorable image of God landing in "enemy-occupied" territory reflects an openness to contemporary concerns, and an attempt to engage their listeners' imagination. Lewis' references, cited above, to "tawdry furniture" brought outside for a move, or a toy left on the lawn, are examples of vivid and homely verbal pictures, with which many in his audience could easily identify. Preachers can learn from such concrete, specific and topical word pictures.

Tilby frequently goes beyond homely images and attempts to draw her listeners into a new world:

We start at 5.00am and find the first shot. Mark [Tully] has to ride by on his camel with the Greek Orthodox monastery of St. Catherine in the background, and the light of the sun is beginning to gild the mountains. It's still almost dark, so we have to wait for light to hit the valley. The first sequence happens without trouble. Now we load the camera, the recorder, the lens boxes, and reflectors onto the camels, and begin the long haul mounted or on foot up to the steps leading to the final ascent. We soon get separated. I decide to walk. It's about half past seven and the most glorious golden light is tipping the edge of the camel path as the sun rises over the mountains. Every figure in our party is transfigured as they wind in and out of its beams. The Orthodox speak of the uncreated light of God, the vision that comes from the desert, and this is the nearest thing I have ever seen to that sheer, pure, beauty. The camera is in its box, securely tied to its camel. Why didn't I do the fullest possible recce of this journey at the right time of day? The glory is here and now and I'm missing it.....¹⁷

their "Yes, but....." So there's a real dialogue. A monologue is where you have no consideration for the audience or congregation. A dialogue is where you are, in your imagination, in dialogue with the people. And I think that is also certainly true for *Thought*." James Jones, Private Recorded Interview with Jolyon Mitchell in Oxford, 15 June 1997. For an interesting parallel to this argument see: "From Monologue to Conversation", Chapter 1 section 3. ii of this thesis.

¹⁷ "Lost but not forgotten", (final) episode 5 of *The Jesus Diary*, Radio 3, 2nd-6th December, 1996, produced by Norman Winter, written and presented by Angela Tilby. Tilby introduces this story in an intriguing style: "So I end with a parable of how the camera misses its shot. We were in the right

This vivid story, like much of Tilby's pictorial language, has a great deal to teach preachers. Her ability to recreate a scene with word pictures is striking. Notice how the "glorious golden" light "gilds" the mountains and tips the edge of the camel path. Consider also how this graphic description provides the foundations for a memorable story. The pictorial language is a central building block for transforming this scene from a two-dimensional diary entry into a three-dimensional portrayal. As argued earlier, preachers should also note that Tilby employs other devices to bring the story to life: active verbs, short sentences balanced with longer phrases and personal direct speech: "Why didn't I.....?"

Nevertheless, Tilby does not over-describe. Her listeners are not told about the colour or age of the camels, the size of the camera boxes or the shape of the mountains. She makes sparse use of adjectives. Tilby leaves room for her listeners to develop the scene in their own imaginations. As Buttrick argues: "adjectives clutter oral language and prevent understanding".¹⁸ The above extract is dominated by nouns and verbs. I would echo Richard Eslinger's claim that "adjectives do not work the same way in literary and in homiletic contexts", and that in preaching, "the effective tools of coloration and description are [generally] nouns and verbs".¹⁹ Sparsity of description combined with reliance upon nouns and verbs will provide conditions conducive to listeners developing the picture in their imaginations, and thereby taking a more active part in the communication process.²⁰

place, at the right time, but we lost the moment. Nevertheless, it is something to know what we missed. The created light we can see, is only a glimmer of the uncreated light we can't see." She concludes this section by admitting that she finished the day "in grief for the lost shot of the train of camels caught in daylight."

¹⁸ David Buttrick, *Homiletic - Moves and Structures*, London: SCM, 1987, p.192. Buttrick identifies the importance of doing descriptive work without using "an alarming number of adjectives."

¹⁹ Richard L. Eslinger, *Pitfalls in Preaching*, Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 1996, p.11. He argues: "multiplying descriptive adjectives within a sermon actually works against its intended purpose." (American spelling of "coloration").

²⁰ Robin Meyers argues: "Our efforts in the pulpit must be more like courtroom sketches than photographs. Leaving the listener with lines to draw and profiles to be sketched is more than desirable - it is the objective." Robin R. Meyers, *With Ears to Hear - Preaching as Self-Persuasion*, Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1993, p.81.

Tilby's description of their early-morning ascent up Mount Sinai serves as a useful reminder of both such homiletical insights and the lessons highlighted in Chapters 4 and 5. Other broadcasters such as Lionel Blue, David Winter, R.S. Wright, and C.S. Lewis demonstrate different stylistic characteristics, which reflect their own personalities, and a sensitive eye and ear to what is happening around them. Preachers can learn from their assorted use of concrete, active and specific images. They can also learn from the way in which pictorial language is used in a variety of fashions: metaphorically, illustratively or representationally. In the example cited above, it is integrated within a single narrative, is delivered in a conversational style of speech and functions parabolically.

Preachers need to develop a sensitive eye both for what they themselves see and for what they "see" in the text. For example, those preachers seeking to illuminate the Passion, can draw not only from their own "Good Friday" and "Easter Sunday" experiences, but also upon the biblical imagery of the "broken bread, the thirty silver coins, the roar of the crowd, the scourge, the crown of thorns, the Cross and the empty tomb at dawn".²¹ Similarly preachers can draw on many of the parables which are rich in verbal imagery. Take a selection of Lukan parables. They graphically portray, for instance, a man who builds his house on rock,²² a sower who broadcasts his seed,²³ and a father who runs, embraces and kisses his profligate son.²⁴ These active images are woven together imaginatively to create unforgettable stories. Preachers, therefore, who employ pictorial language parabolically stand in the tradition of the Galilean story-teller.²⁵ As Cardinal Martini argues, when Jesus "wanted to reveal the mysteries of the Kingdom - realities beyond our inspection - he told parables and used the language of images".²⁶ The language of

²¹ R.E.C. Browne, *The Ministry of the Word*, London: SCM, 1958, p.86. "The Christian religion can never be presented without imagery." Note how Browne includes the aural sign of the "roar of the crowd" in his "imagery".

²² Luke 6: 48-9.

²³ Luke 8: 5-8.

²⁴ Luke 15: 20.

²⁵ See Chapter 3 section 5 of this thesis.

²⁶ Carlo Maria Martini, *Communicating Christ to the World*, trans. by T.M. Lucas, Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1994, p.101, "All religious language is interwoven with symbols, metaphors and images."

images and the deceptively simple imperative: “picture”, has therefore strong biblical precedent.

In the words of James Jones, the Bishop of Hull and an experienced *Thought for the Day* contributor, preachers need to describe situations “visually” and:

Describe what it feels like, what it looks like, and as you describe it so people are seeing it in their mind’s eye, and they are engaged, in the same way that Jesus told parables. I contrast the abstract concept and the concrete image..... we are for ever reducing theology to abstract concepts and then we wonder why we don’t communicate with people. What we’ve got to do is to rediscover the dominical way, which is to tell a story and *describe* a situation, and from that description people can then intuit and deduce the principle or the moral that you’re wanting to explore.²⁷

In this thesis I am arguing for a rediscovery or renewal of a method of preaching which primarily draws not upon abstract concepts, but rather concrete pictorial language.²⁸ This theme runs through the seven chapters of this thesis like a silver thread. For many of the radio broadcasters considered it to be a significant tool. These discussions provide a valuable reminder to preachers to use pictorial language in their preaching.²⁹ As it was suggested in the first chapter there are inevitably dangers with over-using such a tool.³⁰ Nevertheless, in a context where scholars such as Jacques

²⁷ James Jones, Private Recorded Interview with Jolyon Mitchell in Oxford, 15 June 1997. (*Italics* are mine.) He continues: “In 1 Corinthians 13, St Paul said: “Now we look through a glass darkly”. In Greek there is no “darkly” at all: what the Greek says is “Now we see through a glass or a mirror in images, in enigmas.” The Greek word is “enigma”: Now we see through enigma, parables, riddles.the language of Heaven is certainly not abstract concepts. What we have are metaphors, similes, stories, and as communicators we have to rediscover that method.” This emphasis on the enigmatic or indirect nature of communication is echoed by John Tinsley, “Communication, or “Tell it Slant” ” in *Theology Today*, 1979, 35:4, pp.398-404.

²⁸ This could be summarised as: “Show don’t tell”. See, G. Robert Jacks, *Just Say the Word - Writing for the Ear*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1996. “Show more than you tell”. p.72.

²⁹ This reminder can be found in many recent homiletic text books, see, for example: Alvin C. Rueter, *Making Good Preaching Better*, Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1997, especially Chapter 6: “Making Homilies Visual” and Chapter 7: “Making Homilies Oral”. Rueter asserts: “The [verbal] pictures help preacher and listener see how the theme and its supporting points fit our daily lives.” p.63.

³⁰ See: Chapter 1 and text of n.131, 132 and 133 of this thesis. As Paul Scott Wilson argues: “Preachers to whom images very readily come will often load their sermons with images. In the worst cases, competing images shift the focus to a new scene or example every sentence or two. Rather than the images serving the central idea of the sermon, the central idea is subverted into serving the images.”

Ellul perceive “sight to be triumphant”, pictorial language may contribute towards an “understandable language” and “open language that is not stereotyped”.³¹ For preachers this open form of dialogical language should widen to include multi-sensorial discourse.

iii. *Edit*

Alongside listen and picture, stands a third related imperative: *Edit*. Tilby and Winter demonstrate clearly the effectiveness of ruthless editing of any unnecessary or unclear sections, expressions or single words. They show in their final scripts how a good broadcast or sermon is often improved by careful editing and therefore is “economical with words”.³² David Coomes supports this assertion. He finds that most “sermons go on too long” and have too many points.³³ Tilby’s sparse but refined scripts, provide a useful model. Her carefully crafted, but apparently spontaneous broadcasting is a good example of what Ong describes as “secondary orality”. Preachers should be sensitive to this form of discourse, which news reporters such as Ed Murrow and Richard Dimbleby,³⁴ presenters such as Garrison Keillor and religious broadcasters such as Tilby, Blue and Winter also use.³⁵ One way of effectively employing this style of speaking is to edit the sermon script or

Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, Abingdon: Nashville, 1995, p.254. See also R.L. Eslinger, *Pitfalls in Preaching*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996, p.9. “Language that serves up images wholesale represents a pitfall, for it leaves little or no time for any single image to serve as a catalyst for conceptual understanding.” James Jones argues that the danger of using concrete images is “a) that it can be limiting b) it can be manipulative”, *ibid*.

³¹ Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1985, p.263.

See also: Derek Weber, *Preaching to be Heard in a Television Age*, PhD, 1993, p.208. In his Conclusion Weber argues that language for preaching should be visual, concrete and accessible.

³² James Jones also puts great emphasis on being ruthless, and “pairing down” both *Thought for the Day* scripts and sermons. James Jones admits that one of the things he has learnt from doing *Thought* as a preacher is “to be economical with words”. I agree with his assertion that: “Too many preachers are verbose and repetitive”. James Jones, Recorded Interview, 15 June, 1997.

³³ David Coomes, Recorded Interview 19 Dec., 1996. “I’m not a great sermon-lover at all. I find most sermons, they go on too long, they’ve got one, two, three points, so there’re several thoughts whereas it’s best to have just one, developed, and usually they’ve got an agenda and they’re just going to preach it every week in a different guise, whereas the best *Thoughts* are always tackling new things, always tackling them from an imaginative way, a clever way, and are sharp, to the point, and one thought.”

³⁴ See: Chapter 2 section 3. v of this thesis.

³⁵ See: Chapter 6 section 3. ii of this thesis, and see also: Chapter 5 sections 2, 3 and 4 of this thesis.

outline so that it facilitates variations in pace, pitch, tone, images and texture of the presentation.³⁶ Editing should not be so severe, however, that the apparently spontaneous and oral quality of the sermon is lost.³⁷

The earlier emphasis upon using pictorial or multi-sensorial language does not mean that I am suggesting that all other forms of discourse should be edited out.³⁸ Like Lewis' broadcasts there is a place for critical reasoning, a "*Thought for the Week*", in preaching. Just as there is a wide range of literary genres within the bible,³⁹ and a wide range of genres within radio broadcasting,⁴⁰ so preachers should employ a range of preaching forms.⁴¹ Preachers need to edit themselves so that they do not convey the impression through their habitual preaching style, structure or forms that Christianity is entirely built upon pictorial constructs and has no place for sustained arguments about complex issues.⁴² In other words, preachers who are persuaded by the pictorial language argument, should still vary the usual structural form and

³⁶ Variation of volume, pace and pitch can be heard taken to an extreme and distracting level in the broadcasts of Toby Powers. (See Chapter 6 section 3. ii of this thesis) Repetition is one of the characteristics of an oral culture and is to be found in many of the broadcasts of the radio preachers of Chapter 6. This can initially be mesmerising and then become tedious. For preachers this acts as a reminder of the importance of editing "unnecessary sections".

³⁷ See: Edward F. Markquart, *Quest for Better Preaching*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985. Markquart emphasises the importance of developing "living language" for sermons. pp.178-9.

³⁸ It is important to re-emphasise a point made on a number of occasions in this dissertation. Pictorial (and multi-sensorial) language are but one device amongst a range of techniques employed by the experienced broadcasters considered in this thesis. (See for example, the conclusions to Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis).

³⁹ See: Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989.

⁴⁰ It is important to re-emphasise a point made in the second chapter that speech radio is much more than simply "the art of making pictures with words". The different genres within speech radio draw on a variety of formats: call-ins, public debates, rolling news, dramas, magazine features etc.

⁴¹ See: John Killinger, *Fundamentals of Preaching*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985, pp.50-59. For other lists of different forms see also: Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985, p.177; and, Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, Louisville, Kentucky: WJKP, 1989, pp.126-130. Long emphasises "the importance of variety", and argues that: "As a matter of practical experience, preachers must guard against gravitating toward a narrow range of sermon patterns. As preachers, we tend to create sermon forms that match our own ways of listening and learning, and therefore we must self-consciously move beyond our own preferred patterns." p.130.

⁴² Nevertheless, arguments in the New Testament epistles are often supported or enhanced by a well chosen image. David Schlafer points out how: "an abstract definition of faith in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, for example, is immediately fleshed out by a brief retelling of stories about Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah, Moses and others. The argument concludes with the breathtaking image in Hebrews 12 of the cloud of witnesses who support us as we run an arduous race." David J. Schlafer, *Surviving the Sermon*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley, 1992, p.64.

linguistic content of their sermons so that an implicit theological message is not conveyed by the consistent use of one particular sermonic form or structure.

iv. Translate

A further imperative for preachers should be added to listen, picture, and edit: *translate*. Public speech needs to be translated into accessible, conversational and vivid terms.⁴³ As it was argued in Chapter 7, there is considerable precedent for such an act of translation:

The founders of Christianity used the languages and idioms of the people: not a sacred or holy language, nor a learned language, nor did they encourage an ecstatic language. The languages and idioms used by the Christians were those of the wide publics of their time and place. The Christians renewed those in various ways and modified their vocabularies, but there was no flight from the vernacular..... Jesus taught in the living dialect of his time, Aramaic, not in the language of the Scripture, Hebrew. The early Church had no hesitation in translating his words into Greek or into the language of whatever population was evangelized: Latin, Syriac, Coptic, etc.⁴⁴

My argument stands in the tradition of those who renewed, modified,⁴⁵ and translated their discourse for their listeners' benefit.⁴⁶ Likewise, preachers should be prepared

⁴³ This is a recurring theme throughout this thesis. See for example: Chapter 1 section 3. ii, Chapter 2 section 2. iii, and for a more specific case study, see Chapter 5 section 3 (on Rabbi Lionel Blue).

⁴⁴ Amos Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric - The Language of the Gospel*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971 (1964), pp.18-19.

⁴⁵ An intriguing parallel in the field of art history is to be found discussed in the later work of Rudolf Arnheim. (See Chapter 2 section 3 of this thesis for a discussion of his radio theory.) He describes how: "the 'story' of Michelangelo's *Creation of Man*, on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, is understood by every reader of the book of Genesis. But even the story is *modified* in a way that makes it more comprehensible and impressive to the eye. The creator, instead of breathing soul into the body of clay - a motif not easily *translatable* into an expressive pattern - reaches out toward the arm of Adam as though an animating spark, leaping from fingertip to fingertip, were transmitted from the maker to the creature." (*Italics are mine.*) R. Arnheim, *Art and the Visual Perception*, (The New Version), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974, p.459.

⁴⁶ Amos Wilder's words in 1964 sound strangely contemporary: "We hear on all sides about the need for the modernisation of the Christian message, translation of the ancient ideas and images, rediscovery of effective media discourse." *ibid.*, pp.1-2. The attention given to imaginative moves, dialogue, visual stories and plots in preaching represent a significant part of this "modernisation" process in the field of homiletics in the 1990s. My contention is that pictorial and multi-sensorial language can contribute to each of these processes.

to translate biblical terms or narratives into a modern pictorial or multi-sensorial guise.⁴⁷

For example, a modern retelling of the parable of the Good Samaritan provides a useful insight into how one form of translation could work in a sermon.⁴⁸ An Irish setting might also make this tale more accessible, and renew some of its original force for the late 1990s. I will use Eugene Lowry's five-fold narrative structure for preaching.⁴⁹ First, "upset the equilibrium": a British soldier lies in a pool of blood on a road into Belfast: he has been hit. Secondly, "analyse the discrepancy": an orange-order Unionist on his way to the peace talks, approaches but then ignores him. A Catholic priest trips over him by mistake, and then darts to the other side of the road.

Thirdly, "disclose the clue to resolution": a member of the IRA in tattered old jeans kneels beside the soldier. She thinks of her own brother, shot by the army. Fourthly, "experience the gospel": she wipes the blood off his face, heaves him into her car, and takes him to the hospital. Finally, and perhaps most problematical in this interpretation, "anticipate the consequences": a Protestant journalist writes up the story. His headline is: "The Road to Peace". This attempt to translate a well-known parable into a contemporary setting relies upon aptly chosen pictorial language, as well as a tight narrative structure.

Equally important is a sensitivity to the listeners' context. In the same way that the Parable of the Good Samaritan would have provoked different responses amongst Samaritan, Jewish and Gentile listeners, so this translation into an Irish setting would

⁴⁷ Henry Mitchell goes further and argues that preachers have an "obligation to translate all theological ideas into a folk-type language." H. Mitchell, *The Recovery of Preaching*, Rickmansworth: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977, pp.96ff. See also Edmund A. Steimle's argument that Jesus spoke in the "language of Canaan" and preachers should follow his example and speak in more "secular" terms. Edmund Steimle, Morris J. Niedenthal, and Charles L. Rice, *Preaching the Story*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980, pp.166-167.

⁴⁸ For further discussion of this parable, see Chapter 1 section 3. i of this thesis.

⁴⁹ Eugene Lowry's narrative-plot approach to sermons. See Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1980. See also Chapter 1 section 2. iii of this thesis.

carry different meanings for members of the Orange Order, Sinn Fein or the British Army. The obvious, but easily overlooked, point is that the listeners' own situation will inevitably influence how they hear, interpret and respond to this story. It may be that for certain audiences, outside the Irish situation, such a translation would not effectively replicate the original force of the parable. If this is the case, then listeners are more likely to step back and become mere spectators rather than participants in the parable. The result can be a simple nod of the head, rather than a transformed imagination, life-style, or world view. One valuable goal for preachers is, by imaginative translation, to seek characterisations and settings which will resonate with the original impact of such stories. This movement is more likely to invite listeners to move beyond being observers to becoming actors in the drama being played out for them.

Such a retelling or translation would also be more effective if kept free of "religious language".⁵⁰ One of my criticisms of many of the radio preachers discussed in Chapter 6 is that they have not translated their message into a contemporary or accessible guise. They have failed to recognise the importance of moving beyond their own familiar discursive patterns and the terms which they view as appropriate for Christian discourse.⁵¹ Amos Wilder suggests that:

.....early Christian speech favoured no particular language. We can extend this to say that it offers no precedents for what is sometimes

⁵⁰ One qualification to this argument comes with Eslinger's comment that: "one of the hermeneutic issues of this new day in preaching is the cost of *translating* an oral text of biblical narrative into a *visual* presentation of sermonic imagery". See R.L. Eslinger, *Pitfalls in Preaching*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996, p.8. There is a "cost" or potential pitfall in any act of translation.

⁵¹ One way of breaking free from over familiar discursive patterns is by "imaginative elaboration". I have borrowed this phrase from Henry Mitchell. Henry Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1990, pp.65-66. He suggests that: "there is a great need for more vivid but not less valid details, often not given in the Bible or anywhere else. These details help the hearer to be caught up in the experience being narrated, and, as a result, to understand better and be moved to change." I would suggest that this proposal for "imaginative elaboration" further supports the case being put forward for pictorial and multi-sensorial discourse. This form of translation may lead to what Steiner terms as "transfiguration", where the imaginative impact may even "surpass that of the primary text". George Steiner, *Antigones: The Antigone myth in Western literature, art and thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, p.105.

spoken of as the “language of Zion”, that is, a particular vocabulary and imagery thought of as sacred or pious.⁵²

Many of the radio preachers of Chapter 6 are trapped within the “language of Zion”. Preachers can learn from this negative example, and should seek to break free of their linguistic ghettos, and speak in terms that will also be heard and understood by fringe members of their congregations and outsiders.⁵³

This is not just a question of style. Translation is an interpretative and creative act, and involves more complex and substantive issues than merely communicative techniques.⁵⁴ Undoubtedly successful preachers and religious broadcasters will use appropriate pictorial and multi-sensorial language to enliven what they have to say, to translate it into more intelligible terms for those inhabiting pluralist worlds of discourse and to undermine or challenge previously fixed opinions. But not any picture, any translation will do. An authentic bridge between the worlds of the sacred text and our contemporary society will have to be true to both.⁵⁵ Willimon and Newbigin’s critique in Chapter 7 indicates the dangers of reductionism and attenuation of the Christian story.⁵⁶ A whole further area of research opens up:⁵⁷

⁵² *ibid.*, p.20.

⁵³ The precedents for such an action discussed in Chapter 7 section 3 of this thesis, can be supported by a consideration of the preaching of Paul. “Carrying the strange categories of a Jewish apocalyptic gospel into Hellenistic culture, Paul had to make a decision about how to put the two together. He could have insisted that the culture stop speaking in Greek categories and begin immediately to speak the language of Zion, but this was not his choice..... What Paul did,” affirms Long “is to look at the Hellenistic culture through the lens of the gospel, through the frame of the kerygma, and to spot cross-resurrection places where God was at work and then to announce those to his Hellenistic hearers.” Thomas G. Long, “Learning to Speak of Sin”, in Thomas G. Long and Edward Farley, editors, *Preaching as a Theological Task - World, Gospel, Scripture*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996, p.97. Long draws upon the work of Daniel Patte, *Preaching Paul*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.

⁵⁴ See, also, Chapter 7 section 3. i and ii of this thesis.

⁵⁵ See: Gijsbert D.J. Dingemans, “A Hearer in the Pew”, in Thomas G. Long and Edward Farley, *Preaching as a Theological Task - World, Gospel, Scripture*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996. Dingemans describes “bridges that connect our world with the world of the bible” as “analogical bridges”. p.45. He continues: “How can we bridge our feelings of the year 2000 with the experiences of two thousand years ago?Is not our modern, technical, communication-rich world too far remote from the primitive world, including the faith, of the bible?” p.46.

⁵⁶ See Chapter 7 section 3. i of this thesis.

⁵⁷ It would be an interesting research project, for example, to investigate what mode of translation of the biblical text is most appropriate for preachers or religious broadcasters to draw upon? John Dryden’s belief that “all translation” can be reduced to three categories, would provide a useful set

just what are the appropriate pictures, models and metaphors that will reliably do such bridging work in our audio-visual culture?

In summary, I have argued that my data shows the importance of, first, listening to the text, the audience, and the wider communicative context, secondly, creating word pictures, and thirdly, rigorously editing the intended discourse. These actions will all contribute to the translation process in which preachers should be involved. This is not intended to be a comprehensive summation of all the lessons identified for preachers in this dissertation.⁵⁸ Others include: adapt to a new communicative environment,⁵⁹ oralise in conversational speech,⁶⁰ and verbally re-enact textual or personal experiences.⁶¹

I would argue that these lessons are inherent within the four imperatives: listen, picture, edit, and translate. As has been shown, elements of these four imperatives may be found in recent homiletic literature.⁶² This dissertation has highlighted in a new way these important insights by drawing on a largely untapped source: religious radio broadcasting.

A central contention of this thesis has been that preachers can learn both positive and negative lessons from the practice of religious radio broadcasters. It has focused particularly upon the art of making pictures with words. It has demonstrated that

of alternatives for such a discussion. He describes the first form of translation as, "that of *metaphrase*, or turning an author word by word, and line by line, from one language into another..... The second way is that of *paraphrase*, or translation with latitude, where the author is kept in view by the translator, so as never to be lost, but his words are not so strictly followed as by his sense; and that too is admitted to be amplified, but not altered. The third way is that of *imitation*, where the translator (if now he has just lost that name) assumes the liberty, not only to vary from the words and sense, but to forsake them both as he sees occasion; and, taking only some general hints from the original, to run divisions on the ground-work, as he pleases." (*Italics mine*) John Dryden's 1680 "Preface to the Translation of Ovid's Epistles" in *Works*, 18 volumes, edited by W. Scott, London: 1808, Volume XII, pp. 11-12.

⁵⁸ For the highlighting of other insights see, for example, Chapter 4's conclusion.

⁵⁹ See Chapter 2 sections 1 and 2 of this thesis considers the adaptation of radio.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Chapter 4 section 2, section 3. vii, and conclusion discusses the conversational style of broadcasting employed by R.S. Wright and C.S. Lewis.

⁶¹ See, for example, Chapter 5 section 3, and the discussion of Rabbi Lionel Blue's verbal re-enactment of personal experiences.

⁶² See, for example, John Killinger, *Fundamentals of Preaching*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985.

some broadcasters are more successful at this than others. It has argued that the changing context demands a renewal of oralising skills, a re-emphasis of the importance of using fresh and contemporary language, and a refining of the art of making pictures with words.⁶³

This re-formation of orality has the potential to engage not simply the visual imagination, but also the other imaginative senses.⁶⁴ It is a way of speaking which appeals multi-sensorially to the entire person, not simply to the mind. The result is a form of orality which bridges the word-image divide, and invites the listener to participate more fully in the communication process, thereby moving listeners away from being immersed in the Babel of audio-visual stimuli, and towards the Pentecost experience of effective communication.⁶⁵ This re-newed form of orality reflects the translation principle and the embodiment principle which are at the heart of Christianity.

⁶³ James Jones provides another example of a broadcaster and preacher who sees the importance of translating his message into accessible and visual terms: "I'm very, very conscious of not using religious language. I am always alert to try and phrase something in language that is contemporary and fresh..... I try and speak in clean, crisp, vivid pictures." James Jones, Recorded Interview, 15 June 1997.

⁶⁴ For example, Ed Murrow's evocative description of the "drip, drip" of a splintered peaches tin in blitz-damaged London can suggest an image, evoke a sound, and if the sharp edge of the metal and sweet smell of juice were added to the description it could provoke the senses of touch and smell as well. (See Chapter 2 section 3 v. of this thesis.)

⁶⁵ This point finds support in Walter Brueggemann's interpretation of Acts 2: "In Pentecost, when the ideal speech situation emerges, we are granted both ears to hear and tongues to speak." This comment echoes Habermas's concept of the "ideal speech situation", and illustrates Brueggemann's belief in "the fresh capacity to listen" brought about through Pentecost. See: Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982, p.104. I am suggesting that a renewed orality can contribute to an ideal speech situation where speakers will develop a "fresh capacity to listen."

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